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Mediating the Vietnam War: Romania and the First Trinh Signal, 1965-1966

By Larry L. Watts, July 2016



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**Mediating the Vietnam War:
Romania and the First Trinh Signal, 1965-1966**
Larry L. Watts

This working paper examines the little-known Romanian role in the search for a peaceful solution to the Vietnam War during 1965-1966 and leading up to the January 1967 “Trinh Signal,” in which North Vietnam officially accepted the possibility of negotiating with the United States.¹ Forty-one accompanying documents from the Romanian National Archives spanning the period from March 1965 to January 1967 are translated and published in English here for the first time.² These documents indicate that Romania actively encouraged negotiations during 1965-1966 and was far more influential with the North Vietnamese than traditionally thought. They also suggest that Bucharest played a significant role in achieving what is commonly considered the first real breakthrough in movement towards peace talks.

Changing Paradigms and Third Party Efforts

For decades after the Vietnam War the central criterion for assessing the performance of third parties in the search for a negotiated end to that conflict was the degree to which an intermediary shared US perspectives on the preferred resolution of the conflict and promoted the Johnson administration’s “peace initiatives.” Iconic in this regard is that most influential of analyses drawn up during 1967-1968 by the US Department of Defense, colloquially known as the *Pentagon Papers*.³ Its diplomatic volumes judged the seriousness of intermediaries on this basis primarily, setting the tone for academic evaluations for the next 40 years.⁴

¹ This study was made possible by a Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars short-term grant.

² Ten of the documents have previously appeared in the original Romanian. Four of these published by former RCP CC Secretary for Foreign Relations Paul Niculescu-Mizil, who took part in the visits to Hanoi during 1966. Paul Niculescu-Mizil, *România și războiul americano-vietnamez* [Romania and the American-Vietnamese War], Bucharest, Editura Roza Vânturilor, 2008. Another six appear in the Romanian Foreign Ministry and National Archives collection coordinated by former Ambassador to China, Romulus Ioan Budura, *Politica independentă a României și relațiile Româno-Chineze, 1954-1975: Documente* [Romania’s Independent Policy and Romanian-Chinese Relations, 1954-1975], Bucharest, The National Archives, 2008 and *Relațiile Româno-Chineze, 1880-1974: Documente* [Romanian-Chinese Relations, 1954-1975: Documents], Bucharest, Romanian Foreign Ministry and National Archives, 2005. The remaining thirty-one documents are published here for the first time. The author wishes to thank Gabriela Dumitrașcu and Doina Sima of the Romanian National Archives for their kind and expert assistance.

³ Officially titled *Report of the Office of the Secretary of Defense Vietnam Task Force*.

⁴ See, for example, two of the essential earlier works on diplomacy in the Vietnam conflict: Wallace J. Thies, *When Governments Collide: Coercion and Diplomacy in The Vietnam Conflict, 1964-1968*, Berkeley:

Conformity of intermediary efforts with administration policy thus became the *sine qua non* of their positive assessment. The accuracy of US perceptions regarding the dynamics driving that conflict and the functionality of American aims and strategy were not questioned. A different paradigm began to take shape with recognition at the institutional level that the US had misidentified the fundamental nature of the war.⁵

In what amounted to a cascading analytical failure, the US first misjudged the essential nature of that war, which led it to err in identifying the motivations and anticipated behavior of its adversaries, which, in turn, caused it to pursue strategies and tactics inappropriate to such a conflict. Along the way, it employed flawed, superfluous or irrelevant yardsticks with which to measure anticipated progress in defeating the adversary. The underlying error in understanding the nature of the war not only ensured that US reactions would be inappropriate to the conflict at hand but also to the achievement of a negotiated resolution. It virtually guaranteed that signals sent to Hanoi would be counterproductive when they were perceived and understood at all; and that signals received from Hanoi would be overlooked, misinterpreted or rejected outright since they did not square with “reality” as understood in Washington.

Objective assessment of third party peace efforts was further confounded by the considerable disparity between US declaratory policy and actual policy.⁶ Up until the Tet offensive of January-February 1968, the administration of President Lyndon B. Johnson employed multiple peace feelers and public calls for a negotiated end to the war primarily in order to justify its efforts to impose a military solution in Vietnam.⁷ Repeatedly, the Johnson administration launched its “peace offensives” simultaneously with and as partial cover for new escalations in the US military effort.

University of California Press, 1980 and George C. Herring, *The Secret Diplomacy of The Vietnam War: The Negotiating Volumes of the Pentagon Papers*, Austin: University of Texas Press, 1983.

⁵ This evolution is described in Herbert Schandler, “US Military Victory in Vietnam: A Dangerous Illusion?” (chapter 7) in Robert S. McNamara, James Blight, Robert Brigham, Thomas Biersteker and Col. Herbert Schandler, *Argument Without End: In Search of Answers to the Vietnam Tragedy*, New York, PublicAffairs, 1999: 313-372. See also, Herbert Y. Schandler, *America in Vietnam: The War That Couldn't Be Won*, Lanham, Maryland: Rowman and Littlefield, 2009.

⁶ Fredrik Logevall, *Choosing War: The Lost Chance for Peace and the Escalation of War in Vietnam*, Berkeley, University of California Press, 2001. See also George C. Herring, Wallace Thies, Merle L. Pribbenow, Sophie Quinn-Judge, Jessica M. Chapman, Michael R. Adamson and James G. Hershberg, “Forum Discussion: Peace Proposals, Diplomacy, and War: Was an Opportunity Lost for an Early Settlement in Vietnam?” *Journal of Cold War Studies*, Vol. 17, No. 1 (Winter 2015): 153-180.

⁷ Insincerity was also manifest towards the American people. As George Herring notes, the *Pentagon Papers* confirm “that Kennedy and Johnson had secretly committed the nation to war in Vietnam while publicly denying such intentions and that they had repeatedly misled the public in their optimistic reports of progress.” Herring (1980), p. ix.

The record also indicates that key members of the administration sabotaged peace channels when they threatened to undercut the continued pursuit of a military solution prior to the 1968 Tet offensive. Any effort that began to acquire an independent life of its own invariably suffered catastrophic failure.⁸ With remarkable consistency, channels shut down because of untimely US bombing raids on North Vietnam, because the conditions of specific US proposals were suddenly and unilaterally changed, or because Washington inexplicably decided to drop a particular channel, abruptly shifting its attentions elsewhere.⁹

The administration thus oscillated between wholehearted support for initial stages of contact to derision and denunciation of a channel when it appeared on the verge of delivering results that might compromise actual administration policy or constrain future policy options. The standard pattern of engagement and distancing usually ended with the character of the intermediary impugned, its performance and abilities derided, and its efforts ridiculed and dismissed. This denouement was presaged by an overall characterization of third parties as overly self-interested, morally and political questionable, and less than fully competent, thus warranting heightened skepticism from the start.¹⁰ In an allegation frequently voiced by Johnson and his top advisers (and sometimes even true), intermediaries were depicted as being driven by reasons of personal prestige and ego; as out to win the Nobel Prize.

[[Document 6](#)]

A third party effort cast as dubious and ineffective *a priori* could be shut down at little or no political cost if and when it was perceived as threatening policy. In consequence, for example, Polish efforts were characterized as insincere and mercenary and those of Hungary as simple fraud.¹¹ The new paradigm permits analysts to transcend these policy-convenient biases and has already revealed the far greater seriousness of most intermediaries.¹²

⁸ According to one of the men seriously engaged in finding a peaceful resolution to the conflict: "So long as we simply went through the motions, the White House and many of the president's advisers would ignore or tolerate our activity. But once there seemed to be a prospect of attracting Hanoi's interest, we would discover some booby traps along the way." Chester Cooper, *In The Shadow of History: Fifty Years Behind the Scenes of Cold War Diplomacy*, New York, Prometheus, 2005, p. 245.

⁹ Robert S. McNamara, *In Retrospect: The Tragedy and Lessons of Vietnam*, New York: Vintage, 1996, pp. 247-250.

¹⁰ See e.g. James G. Hershberg, *Marigold: The Lost Chance For Peace In Vietnam*, Washington D.C.: Stanford University Press/The Woodrow Wilson Center, 2012, p. 710, 712-713.

¹¹ See e.g. Transcript, Dean Rusk Oral History Interview II, 9/26/69, by Paige E. Mulhollan, Internet Copy, LBJ Library, Tape 1, p. 14. Available at www.lbjlib.utexas.edu; Tape 2 in Ibid, p. 4; Larry L. Watts, *Extorting Peace: Romania and The End of The Cold War*, Bucharest, RAO, 2014, pp. 33-38.

¹² This was most spectacularly demonstrated regarding Poland in Hershberg (2012). See also Zoltán Szöke, "Delusion or Reality? Secret Hungarian Diplomacy during the Vietnam War," *Journal of Cold War Studies*, Vol. 12, No. 4 (Fall 2010): 119-180.

States and their leaders often do not say what they mean in foreign and security policy.¹³ However, the concept that the US administration was willfully deceiving its own representatives and the US population as well as international audiences was a bitter pill very hard to swallow for most Americans. Fundamental attribution biases predisposed US analysts to presume goodwill and honest intent on the part of their own administration and insincerity and bad faith on the part of America's adversaries, not the other way round.

Accurate perception of the Vietnam conflict and of the intermediary efforts within it was further confounded by the heavy ideological component of US policy at the time. Washington viewed the conflict as resulting from the expansion of a monolithic Communist bloc despite its awareness of the reality of Sino-Soviet clashes and of Soviet interest in an early end to the conflict.¹⁴ Ideological justifications based on fears of a communist "monster plot" and "falling dominoes" served to reinforce the original analytical error regarding the nature of the war.¹⁵

Paradoxically, the sincerity of the US personnel designated to pursue peaceful resolution of the conflict constituted yet another confounding element. The men chosen by President Johnson to search for a negotiated peace were completely convinced as to the necessity of a negotiated solution, thoroughly committed to finding one, and generally sincere in their dealings with third-party intermediaries (albeit within the constraints of US policy). While their dedication lent credibility to claims of overall US sincerity, the consistently demonstrated preference of the administration for a military solution gave policy in this domain a decidedly schizophrenic cant. In consequence, analysts have not only to determine whether a channel was serious but also whether and when it was treated seriously by the administration.

The existence of parallel tracks operating simultaneously and the practice of jumping from one track to another further confounded any determination of causality.¹⁶ The *Pentagon*

¹³ On the often wide variance between declaratory and actual policy see John L. Gaddis, "Expanding the Database: Historians, Political Scientists and the Enrichment of Security Studies," *International Security*, vol. 12, no. 1 (1987): 3-21.

¹⁴ See e.g. *Memorandum From the Chairman of the Policy Planning Council (Rostow) to the Secretary of State*, Washington, January 10, 1964, Document 9 and *Memorandum From the Chairman of the Policy Planning Council (Rostow) to the Secretary of State*, Washington, February 13, 1964, Document 43 in *Foreign Relations Of The United States, 1964-1968*, Volume I, *Vietnam*, 1964.

¹⁵ See e.g. Harold P. Ford, "Calling the Sino-Soviet Rift," *Studies in Intelligence*, (Winter 1998/1999), https://www.cia.gov/library/center-for-the-study-of-intelligence/csi-publications/csi-studies/studies/winter98_99/art05.html.

¹⁶ The *Pentagon Papers* provides detail on thirteen separate peace initiatives and contacts, eight of which during the period November 1966-March 1968 are considered "major." The "usual pattern" involved "simultaneous exchanges through several channels" and this "simultaneous pursuit by both sides of a dual-track strategy

Papers examined in some detail thirteen separate channels, “tracks” and contacts. However, administration officials acknowledged more than two-dozen efforts and Washington originally contacted 147 entities and individuals for assistance. According to George W. Ball, the Under Secretary of State from 1961-1966 there “may have been as many as 2,000 attempts to initiate peace talks between 1965 and 1967.”¹⁷ The fact that all of these efforts had the same general aim in common – initiating negotiations – made the establishment of clear causal linkages between individual mediation efforts and Vietnamese or American behavior exceedingly difficult.

Bureaucratic gerrymandering and partisan political interests within the administration added still more complexity. For example, Romanian-American exchanges during 1965-1966 were carried out on the American side through the US Ambassador to the United Nations in New York, Arthur Goldberg, or directly with Secretary of State Dean Rusk. President Johnson had initially assigned Goldberg the task to conduct the search for a negotiated solution to the war in July 1965 but never granted him the requisite authority and frequently excluded him. As Ambassador Goldberg later told an interviewer, “I was asked to participate in a venture to try and extricate our country as a principal adviser and found I was not the principal adviser.”¹⁸ According to McGeorge Bundy, the President’s National Security Adviser during 1961-1966, Johnson exploited Goldberg to “prove” that peace negotiations were impossible in order to justify the military policies of his administration.¹⁹

By July 1966 the “search for peace” was further divided when Johnson appointed W. Averell Harriman to coordinate it through a “Negotiations Committee.”²⁰ Like Goldberg, Harriman was also denied the authority necessary for such a mission. According to administration officials directly involved in these initiatives, President Johnson and Secretary Rusk never intended Harriman’s “peace group” to become a serious institution that could

involving multiple diplomatic channels” made this period the most complex “by far” and the “most difficult” to analyze. Thies (1980), pp. 143-144.

¹⁷ David L. DiLeo, *George Ball, Vietnam, And The Rethinking Of Containment*, Chapel Hill, University of North Carolina Press, 1991, p. 84.

¹⁸ Transcript, Arthur Goldberg Oral History Interview I, March 23, 1983, by Ted Gittinger, Internet Copy, LBJ Library, pp. 11-12, 18.

¹⁹ Transcript, McGeorge Bundy, Oral History Interview II, February 17, 1969, by Paige Mulhollan, Internet Copy, LBJ Library, p. 19. As Bundy stated: “Does he think it’s going to change: does *Johnson* think Goldberg is going to bring peace? No.” Emphasis in the original.

²⁰ See e.g. Document 197 in *Foreign Relations of the United States (FRUS), 1964-1968, Volume IV, Vietnam 1966*, footnote 1; Rudy Abrahamson, *Spanning The Century: The Life of W. Averell Harriman, 1891-1986*, New York, William Morrow and Company, 1992, p. 639.

achieve its assigned mission.²¹ Harriman, along with US Permanent Representative to the United Nations Arthur Goldberg and Vice-President Hubert Humphrey, was one of Johnson's main emissaries announcing the search for peace to key allies, friends and possible players at the end of 1965. Even at that early point in the process, however, senior administration officials were concealing certain channels from the principle "peacemakers" designated by that same administration. During Harriman's December 1965 visits, for example, Secretary of State Dean Rusk, with the approval of President Johnson, actively prevented the emissary from meeting what Rusk then considered a key French conduit to Hanoi, and then interceded with Hungarian officials in Budapest to scuttle Harriman's visit there as well.²²

The appointment of Walter W. Rostow to replace Bundy as National Security Adviser in April 1966 did nothing to improve this situation. As Harriman's chief assistant later described it, Rostow was "especially unhelpful" in the pursuit of peace negotiations. Rostow "not only denigrated Harriman's mission in general but, I became quite certain, undermined many of our efforts."²³ The disjointed and dysfunctional nature of the institutional search for peace seriously compromised the administration's ability to perceive any individual channel with accuracy.

Given that the administration sent out similar messages along multiple parallel channels simultaneously, the dating of individual channels and assessments of their relative effectiveness and importance were often highly subjective. In the final analysis, the administration was less interested in the channel than in Hanoi's response to its messages. Thus, reception of a preferred response – whether or not it had suffered modification in transmission – conferred immediate importance and attention to the channel that conveyed it with the unintended consequence of undervaluing the less spectacular longer-term effort that led up to it.

The Polish effort codenamed MARIGOLD, for example, had roots extending considerably further back than the June-December 1966 time span described by the *Pentagon Papers*. Poland had served on the International Control Commission for the Demilitarized Zone in Vietnam since 1954, which permitted Warsaw's official contacts in Hanoi and Saigon for over a decade prior. And Poland was previously rumored to be involved in

²¹ See e.g. the comments of Benjamin Read, the Special Assistant to the Secretary of State and Executive Secretary of the Department of State during 1963-1969, in Transcript, Benjamin H. Read Oral History Interview II, March 1970, by Paige Mulholland, Internet Copy, LBJ Library, p. 22.

²² See e.g. Documents 261-263 and 273 in *FRUS 1964-1968*, Volume III, *Vietnam, June-December 1965*.

²³ Cooper (2005), p. 245.

mediation attempts during 1963.²⁴ Consequently, MARIGOLD should be considered within a context of Polish involvement much broader than the six months commonly allocated.²⁵

The Romanian effort is likewise described as running from October 1966 until February 1968, although in unrelated fits and starts until November 1967.²⁶ In spite of the fact that the *Pentagon Papers* includes evidence of much earlier Romanian involvement in the search for peace in the first of its “diplomatic volumes” (VI. A.), efforts prior to November 1967 are dismissed as haphazard and negligible in the volume discussing the Romanian “track” (VI. C. 4.), and those prior to October 1966 are ignored and, in effect, denied.²⁷ According to the *Pentagon Papers*, the Romanian “track” was deemed “serious” (and therefore worthy of analysis) only at the end of 1967 when it was codenamed PACKERS.²⁸ Subsequent studies thus tend to describe the Romanian channel as running only from November or even December 1967 until February 1968. Thus, an effort documented as extending over at least year and a half, is generally estimated as only lasting for two to six months.²⁹

Taking their cue from the *Pentagon Papers*, scholars have tended to define effectiveness in the search for a negotiated peace in terms of a particular channel’s ability to elicit responses and behaviors from Hanoi desired by the US administration. Not surprisingly, all third party efforts received failing grades. Although senior officials later acknowledged some channels as effective, competent and sincere, none were able to persuade the North Vietnamese to accept American interpretations and proposals or to elicit the behaviors that

²⁴ The rumor of mediation in 1963 is discussed in Margaret K. Gnoinska, *Poland and Vietnam, 1963: New Evidence on Secret Communist Diplomacy and the Manelli Affair*, Working Paper no. 45, Cold War International History Project, March 2005.

²⁵ Such consideration was provided for the first time in James G. Hershberg (with the assistance of L. W. Gluchowski), *Who Murdered “Marigold”: New Evidence on the Mysterious Failure of Poland’s Secret Initiative to Start US-North Vietnamese Peace Talks, 1966*, Cold War International History Project Working Paper No. 27, Washington, D.C., Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars, April 2000. See also Hershberg (2012).

²⁶ After stating that the Romanian track “extended from October 1966 through February 1968,” the *Pentagon Papers* then breaks it up into periods of intensity – “January 1967, October and November 1967, and December 1967 through January 1968,” leaving readers to choose among a half dozen or more possible time-lines to described Romanian efforts. *Pentagon Papers* (1997), Part VI. C. 4., pp. 4-5.

²⁷ See *Ibid*, Part VI. A., pp. 22-23 and Part VI. C. 4., pp. 247-290.

²⁸ According to the *Pentagon Papers* the Romanian channel “began to receive high level attention and priority in Washington” only after November 28, 1967. Part VI. C. 4, p. 277.

²⁹ Mircea Munteanu, who as of this writing has made the most serious contribution to elucidating Romania’s involvement, still operates within the framework established by the *Pentagon Papers*. He thus claims that the Romanian channel “began in the fall of 1967 and ended on 24 February 1968” in Mircea Munteanu, “Over the Hills and Far Away: Romania’s Attempts to Mediate the Start of US-North Vietnamese Negotiations, 1967-1968,” *Journal of Cold War Studies*, vol. 14, no. 3 (Summer 2012): 68. For international media descriptions of Romania’s effort in May-June 1966 see the *Newsweek* and *Le Monde* articles cited in the *Pentagon Papers*, “Negotiations 1965-1967: The Public Record,” Part VI. A., p. 22.

Washington desired.³⁰ Analysts previously attributed this failure to the intermediaries but post-Cold War archival revelations confirm unrealistic US expectations based on erroneous notions of the nature of the war and the character of the adversary as the root cause.

However, the search for peace in Vietnam was about more than fulfilling American desiderata. Genuine third party contributions that did not merely support one side against the other faced two challenges of a primordial and, as it turned out, insurmountable nature. The first was the Johnson Administration's essential insincerity towards the pursuit of a negotiated peace during 1965-1967, based on its misreading of starting conditions and its subsequent analytical myopia concerning ongoing developments. On this front, the main task was to bring the US administration around to a more realistic assessment of the nature of the conflict, of the staying power of the Vietnamese and of the still immense resources available to Hanoi, domestically, regionally and from the rest of the socialist community worldwide. The challenge was to convince the administration that genuine negotiations and withdrawal really were in US interest and that continued military operations were not.

The second main obstacle to be overcome was Hanoi's blanket rejection of peace negotiations based on its perception of negotiations as capitulation and on the deeply held conviction that Washington harbored treacherous motivation for advocating them. This obstacle could not be surmounted with arguments of US sincerity. In fact, the attempt to do so doomed several otherwise serious channels. The chief problem with US credibility was that it had prevented the holding of free elections as required by the 1954 Geneva Accords.³¹ In this case, US interest in preventing communists from coming to power clearly trumped the respect that American leadership normally manifested for democratic process and the will of the people.³² Therefore, Hanoi had to be persuaded that its interests would be served by engaging in negotiations despite US insincerity. Until these two challenges were met, Washington would continue making calls for peace negotiations that it did not mean and

³⁰ The core of the problem was that US aims, based on gross misevaluation of the motivations for and dynamics of the conflict in Vietnam, were fundamentally incompatible with those of Hanoi.

³¹ President Eisenhower openly admitted the agreement of virtually every specialist on Indochina that, if elections had been permitted, "possibly 80 per cent of the population would have voted for the Communist Ho Chi Minh as their leader rather than Chief of State Bao Dai." Dwight D. Eisenhower, *The White House Years: Mandate for Change, 1953-1956*, New York, Doubleday, 1963, p. 372.

³² National Security Adviser McGeorge Bundy laid this out in the starkest of terms at the end of 1965: "Are we seeking a negotiated solution after which the superior political skill of the Communists would eventually produce a Commie takeover? Or are we determined to do all that is necessary to establish and sustain a genuinely non-Communist South Vietnam? All three of us (McGeorge Bundy, Rusk and McNamara) incline to the latter position, but it is clear that its costs continue to grow, and it is still more clear that only the President can decide it." *Telegram From the President's Special Assistant for National Security Affairs (Bundy) to President Johnson, in Texas, Washington, November 8, 1965, 11:42 a.m., Document 192 in FRUS, 1964-1968, Volume III, Vietnam, June-December 1965.*

Hanoi would continue to reject negotiations as American treachery, while both continued to fight.

From this perspective, the comparative effectiveness of third party efforts can be evaluated according to their ability (1) to persuade Hanoi to accept peace negotiations in principle and commit to them in fact; and (2) to persuade the United States that a military resolution was illusory and that the only viable option was more sincere engagement in a negotiation process. With few exceptions, this type of analysis still constitutes the “road less-traveled” in studies of third party intermediation during the Vietnam War.³³

Establishing cause and effect between intermediary efforts and US understanding of the conflict is a virtual impossibility. Aside from the more than one hundred individuals and entities around the world from which Washington requested assistance, many more of America’s allies, friends and sympathizers advised the administration of its folly in private while maintaining public solidarity with the United States. Leading political figures within Johnson’s own party (e.g. Senators Mike Mansfield, William Fulbright, Robert Kennedy) and “dissenters” within his administration (e.g. George Ball, Arthur Goldberg) did the same. In the background, a growing anti-war movement within the United States undoubtedly exercised its influence on the thinking of senior American officials.

The “public ‘hawk’, private ‘dove’” phenomenon, whereby staunch public advocates of Johnson’s Vietnam policy were privately advising the president to rethink his approach (e.g. Robert McNamara, McGeorge Bundy), illustrates the complexity of establishing causal linkage. At best, the arguments proffered by third parties and judged as reasonable and persuasive by individuals and entities within the US government (e.g. by the State Department’s Intelligence and Research bureau) may have reinforced internal pressures for reconsidering administration policy.

At first glance, determining causality in the evolution of Vietnamese thinking appears somewhat less complicated because very few of the scores and hundreds of individuals and entities interacting with the Johnson administration actually made the trip to Hanoi. And fewer still had anything more than the briefest of contacts with the leadership in Vietnam. Hypothetically then, comparison of the timing and substance of third party arguments with

³³ James Hersberg’s *Marigold* constitutes a major exception. Although it is largely focused on the Polish channel, it does trace the development of North Vietnamese attitudes and policies during 1966-1967 in parallel with third party efforts, thus permitting the formulation of causal hypotheses. The present study suffers similar limitations, given its focus on the Romanian channel, although some comparison is made of efforts vis-à-vis the first Trinh signal.

Hanoi's decisions and declarations could reveal which arguments from which third parties had been found most persuasive and when.

However, in spite of Hanoi's repeated rejection of negotiations during the first half of the 1960s, senior Vietnamese leaders also held them to be desirable when the time was right. Vietnamese Workers Party (VWP) leader Le Duan had insisted on the eventual necessity of negotiations and the need for greater political-diplomatic efforts at the December 1965 (12th) Plenum, emphasizing that the Vietnamese had successfully employed a "talk-fight" stratagem against the Ming Dynasty (just as the Chinese had used against Chiang Kaishek and the Koreans against the Americans).³⁴

Any categorical attribution of cause and effect between third party advice and Vietnamese response is therefore extremely difficult. At any point in time Hanoi may simply have decided to implement a policy option already discussed internally and applied with success previously.³⁵ In the absence of clarifying archival evidence, the most one can assert is that a third party effort may have influenced the form and timing of such moves. Establishing a causal linkage between third party influence and specific declarations, stratagems and policy shifts in Hanoi simply requires more solid evidence.

Another causal knot results from the fact that the various Soviet bloc intermediaries said many of the same things. Some, no doubt, arrived at the same conclusions through similar but independent logical processes. Some may have adopted approaches and arguments shared with them by their allies or mandated by Moscow, which was continually briefed by the other Warsaw Pact members, including Romania.

Given this commonality of themes and similarity of goals, the twin problem arises of determining who said what first and who was actually heard by Hanoi. Although the messages were similar and sometimes identical, they enjoyed different receptions and elicited different responses in both nuance and substance depending on a variety of factors. These included timing, context (especially in relation to immediately prior or concurrent US

³⁴ *Speech Given by Party First Secretary Le Duan to the 12th Plenum of the Party Central Committee, December 1965*, in Merle Pribbenow, *North Vietnam's "Talk-Fight" Strategy and the 1968 Peace Negotiations with the United States*, Cold War History International Project e-Dossier No. 33, Woodrow Wilson Center, April 16, 2012, <https://www.wilsoncenter.org/publication/north-vietnams-talk-fight-strategy-and-the-1968-peace-negotiations-the-united-states>.

³⁵ For example, the response that Polish diplomat Jerzy Michalowski received from DRV authorities after delivering Harriman's message to Hanoi during *Operation Lumbago* in January 1966, that they would "think about planning a transition to peace initiatives," was probably less the result of Harriman's message than a reflection of the decision expressed by Le Duan earlier, in December 1965 at the VWP CC 12th Plenum, to do exactly that at the appropriate moment. For the response see Hershberg (2000), p. 11.

military operations), frame of mind of the North Vietnamese, current standing of the presenters and the manner in which they were presented.

Until it is possible to compare the transcripts of discussions between the various third parties and officials of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam the effort to identify relative influence and impact of third party performance will by necessity remain inconclusive. This study seeks to provide a glimpse into the reasoning and intentions that lay behind Bucharest's mediation efforts and a better understanding of Romanian policy and activity leading up to the first Trinh signal of January 1967. It is based on the accompanying document collection and on the records of the US State Department, the *Pentagon Papers*, and the US intelligence community as well as previous analyses of Soviet bloc third party intermediation efforts.³⁶

Competing Perceptions

Of all the undervalued third-party efforts to find a negotiated end to the war in Vietnam, the Romanian channel was among the most egregiously misconstrued by the US Department of Defense.³⁷ The *Pentagon Papers* described the Romanians as "very poor reporters" whose "clarifications" were so far "out of whack" that they were taken seriously neither by Washington nor Hanoi.³⁸ The Pentagon (and especially the US military command in Vietnam and the Joint Chiefs of Staff) considered the Romanians not only inept and inaccurate but insincere as well. General William Westmoreland, the commander of US operations in Vietnam, even suggested that Romanian mediation was meant to provide camouflage for North Vietnam's offensive military preparations.³⁹ When the negotiation volumes of the *Pentagon Papers* were first leaked to the media in 1972, Pentagon officials

³⁶ First among those scholars is Hershberg, who conducted detailed research not only into the Polish effort but also into the Czechoslovak and Hungarian efforts. The Hungarian effort is analyzed in Janos Radvanyi, *Delusion and Reality: Gambits, Hoaxes, & Diplomatic One-Upmanship in Vietnam*, South Bend, IN: Gateway Editions, 1978 and, more objectively, in Szöke (2010): 119-180. As of this writing, scholarly treatments of the Romanian effort focused only on 1967-1968. See e.g. Munteanu (2012): 64-96.

³⁷ Vietnam Task Force, *United States - Vietnam Relations, 1945-1967*, US Department of Defense, 1968. Only the Hungarian channel suffered a similar degree of derision. In that case, however, Budapest's senior official in Washington claimed the channel to be an elaborate "fraud." Janos Radvanyi, "A Bizarre Adventure in Make-Believe Diplomacy," *Life*, March 22, 1968: 60-68, 71-72, 74 and Radvanyi (1978). US suspicion was also fed by Hungarian Foreign Minister Janos Peter's earlier identification as a Soviet agent. *Memorandum of Conversation*, Washington, September 10, 1964, Document 105, *Foreign Relations of the United States (FRUS), 1964-1968*, Volume XVII. See also Martin Mevius, *Agents of Moscow: The Hungarian Communist Party and the Origins of Socialist Patriotism 1941-1953*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2005, pp. 237-238.

³⁸ PPDV, Volume VI. A. "Settlement of the Conflict: Negotiations, 1965-67, The Public Record," p. 7; Volume VI. C. 4. "Settlement of the Conflict: Negotiations, 1967-68, History of Contacts," p. 3; p. 263.

³⁹ General William C. Westmoreland, *A Soldier Reports* (Garden City, New York: Doubleday & Company, 1976), p. 312.

contacted by journalists claimed that the Romanian reports had been “regarded with particular doubt by the Johnson administration.”⁴⁰

Remarkably, the *Pentagon Papers* misrepresented the opinion of President Lyndon B. Johnson and his closest advisors regarding the Romanian channel by about one hundred and eighty degrees. Rather than manifesting “particular doubt” and suspicion towards Bucharest because of its ineptitude and bad faith, President Johnson so appreciated the “meticulous care and accuracy” of Romanian reports that he took the unprecedented measure of officially expressing his “sincere gratitude for the efforts of the Romanian government” while they were still underway.⁴¹ Secretary of State Dean Rusk, one of Johnson’s closest advisers, registered the fact that he, too, was “impressed with the seriousness,” “precision,” and “attention to accurate details” demonstrated by the Romanians.⁴²

After leaving office Johnson and Rusk continued to regard the Romanian effort as “balanced” and “accurate,” “serious and sober.”⁴³ Under Secretary of State Nicholas Katzenbach likewise described the Romanian channel as “clear and serious” in internal State Department communications.⁴⁴ Even that most belligerent of “hawks” within the Johnson administration, National Security Advisor Walt W. Rostow, acknowledged the seriousness of Romanian interlocutors.⁴⁵

Similarly favorable opinions were expressed by those directly responsible for pursuing the elusive peace. Chester Cooper, an assistant deputy director in the US Central Intelligence Agency before becoming executive assistant to Ambassador-at-Large W. Averell Harriman in 1966, described the Romanians as “among the most effective of the

⁴⁰ Stanley Karnow, “Pentagon Papers Bare Confused LBJ Truce Efforts,” *Washington Post*, 27 June 1972.

⁴¹ Telegram 98490 to Bucharest, January 14, instructed DCM Neubert to deliver a message to Ceausescu from Johnson thanking his government for its efforts “to bring about an honorable and peaceful solution.” *Memorandum of Conversation*, January 18, 1968, Document 18, footnote 4. The *Pentagon Papers* note that, “on January 15, President Johnson sent a letter of appreciation for the Romanian efforts to President Ceausescu,” VI C.4, p. 288. See also Paul Niculescu-Mizil, *România și Războiul Americano-vietnamez* [Romania and the American-Vietnamese War], Bucharest, Editura Roza Vânturilor, 2008, pp. 252-253.

⁴² US Department of State, *Memorandum of Conversation*, Subject: Vietnam Peace Talks, January 6, 1968, 11:00 a.m., Secretary’s Office, Secret – NODIS/PACKERS, pp. 1, 10 in Box 498, Folder 3, Harriman Papers, LOC. In a 1969 interview Dean Rusk commented favorably on only two efforts for their seriousness, “the Kissinger [French] and the Rumanian channels.” Transcript, Dean Rusk Oral History Interview II, 9/26/69, by Paige E. Mulhollan, Internet Copy, LBJ Library, Tape 2, p. 4, www.lbjlib.utexas.edu.

⁴³ Lyndon Baines Johnson, *The Vantage Point: Perspectives of the Presidency, 1963-1969*, New York, Holt Reinhart Winston, 1971, p. 269; Transcript, Dean Rusk Oral History Interview II, 9/26/69, by Paige E. Mulhollan, Internet Copy, LBJ Library, Tape 1, pp. 4, 14, www.lbjlib.utexas.edu

⁴⁴ State 98130, SecState WashDC to Amembassy Saigon, Top Secret, Immediate, 12 January 1968, in NARA, RG 59, Pol 27/14 Viet/ PACKERS as cited in Munteanu (2012), p. 77, footnote 49.

⁴⁵ *Telegram From the President’s Special Assistant (Rostow) to President Johnson in Texas*, Washington, January 4, 1968, 0510Z, Document 4 in *FRUS, 1964-1968*, Volume VI. The Romanian channel was the only one noted by Rostow in his 1969 oral history interview. Transcript, Walt W. Rostow Oral History Interview I, 3/21/69, by Paige E. Muhollan, Internet Copy, LBJ Library, p. 51.

intermediaries.”⁴⁶ Benjamin Read, special assistant to Secretary Rusk and executive secretary of the State Department, was perhaps uniquely qualified to evaluate the various channels given his responsibility for classified communications that shuttled between Rusk and Rostow. According to Read, the Romanians were “faithful reporters of the other fellow’s viewpoint” and “turned out to be absolutely first-class intermediaries – better than the French; better than the Russians.”⁴⁷

Averell Harriman, the head of the “Negotiations Committee” at the State Department, appreciated the “clarity” and “meticulous care” taken by the Romanians “to avoid any possible misunderstanding” between the protagonists.⁴⁸ According to his biographer: “Of all the intermediaries who made the journey to Hanoi,” Harriman believed the Romanians to be “the most skillful in sensing nuances that had developed in the continuous fencing between the two sides.”⁴⁹ In October 1968, while head of the US delegation to the peace negotiations, he even sent a personal message of thanks for “Romania’s help in organizing the Paris Peace Talks on Vietnam.”⁵⁰ He was so convinced of the value of Bucharest’s contribution that he publicly rebutted the Pentagon’s derisive presentation of the Romanian effort when it was splashed across the US press in the summer of 1972. According to Harriman: “In my long experience I have never received more detailed and accurate reports” and “it is clear to me that the North Vietnamese took the Romanian effort very seriously, as did the United States.”⁵¹

Bucharest had discussed Southeast Asia with Washington as early as 1964 but had dealt with Vietnam only tangentially.⁵² According to US press reports, as yet unconfirmed,

⁴⁶ Chester L. Cooper, *The Lost Crusade: America in Vietnam*, Dodd, Mead & Company 1970, p. 383.

⁴⁷ Transcript, Benjamin H. Read Oral History Interview II, 3/70, by Paige E. Mulhollan, Internet Copy, LBJ Library. Read was apparently referring to the *PENNSYLVANIA* channel involving Henry Kissinger and Frenchmen Herbert Marcovitch and Raymond Aubrac, and earlier contacts through French diplomat Jean Sainteny, as well as to US-Soviet and US-U.K.-USSR initiatives in the *SUNFLOWER* channel.

⁴⁸ *Record of Meeting*, Washington, January 5, 1968, Document 5 in *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1964-1968*, Volume VI. See also Library of Congress, Manuscript Division, Harriman Papers, Special Files, Public Service, Kennedy-Johnson, Subject Files, M-Man. Secret; Nodis; PACKERS.

⁴⁹ Rudy Abramson, *Spanning the Century: The Life of W. Averell Harriman*, New York, William Morrow, 1992, p. 653.

⁵⁰ Cyrus Sulzberger, *An Age of Mediocrity: Memoirs and Diaries*, New York, Macmillan, 1973, p. 469

⁵¹ Harriman’s original letter dated June 28, 1972 is in Box 604, Harriman Papers, Manuscript Division, US Library of Congress. The newspaper delayed its publication two months. See W. Averell Harriman, “Gratitude for Romanians” in “Letters To The Editor,” *Washington Post*, September 13, 1972, A15.

⁵² According to Gheorghe Gaston Marin, who visited Washington to conclude bilateral economic and cultural agreements in 1964, Rusk raised this topic while they were aboard LBJ’s yacht on May 23, 1964. At the time, Gaston Marin was Vice President of the Council of Ministers, head of Romania’s State Planning Committee and chief of its Nuclear Energy Commission. See the interview with Gaston Marin by Lavinia Betea, “De la Kremlin spre Vest și Casa Albă” [From the Kremlin To the West and the White House], *Jurnalul National*, Bucharest, March 6, 2007. Mircea Malita, a former deputy foreign minister, claims that Secretary of State Rusk got an earful when he asked Foreign Minister Manescu for his opinion on the war in Vietnam in 1964. Mircea

US Ambassador to Bucharest William Crawford first requested Romanian “good offices” with the North Vietnamese in June 1965.⁵³ The first documented discussion of the problem occurred on 3 October, 1965, when Ambassador Crawford visited Prime Minister Ion Gheorghe Maurer to deliver his formal farewells prior to his final departure from Romania for his next assignment.

Instead of the ordinarily purely protocol gesture lasting some 10-15 minutes, Maurer took the US ambassador aside for the better part of two hours to discuss the Vietnam war (with some 45 minutes devoted to China.)⁵⁴ Maurer asserted with very little diplomacy that American policy was based on a wrong-headed understanding of the conflict and that US actions were both counterproductive to US interests and dangerously disruptive of the international situation. Although Ambassador Crawford’s report on that discussion has yet to emerge from the State Department records, the Romanians shared part of it with Chinese officials later that month. [[Document 6](#)]

Something in the Romanian perspective piqued Washington’s interest enough for US Secretary of State Dean Rusk to invite Foreign Minister Corneliu Manescu for a dinner discussion less than two weeks later, on 14 October, during which he requested Romanian assistance in the search for a negotiated solution to the war and broached the issue of China.⁵⁵ Unfortunately only one-third of the 14 October, 1965 meeting has been published and the reproduced section, described as the first of three parts, suggests the continuation rather than

Malita, *Secolul Meu Scurt* [My Short Century], Bucharest, RAO, 2015, pp. 357-358. Vietnam was raised again at the end of 1964 when Manescu presented to Rusk the reasons why the US had to engage the People’s Republic of China in discussions. Romanian National Archives (*Arhivele Naționale ale României*: ANR), Fond C.C. al P.C.R., Secția Relații Externe, dosar 45/1964, file 4-15.

⁵³ For example, *New York Times*, November 22, 1965, pp. 1, 3. Citing official sources in Washington, media reports in 1966 and 1971 repeatedly identified June 1965 as the start of Romanian involvement.

⁵⁴ Maurer brought the head and deputy head of the Foreign Ministry’s North America Department into the discussion and made them responsible for monitoring any sign of US response or policy modification. Author’s interviews and email correspondence with Mircea Raceanu, former head (then deputy) of the North American Department in the Romanian Foreign Minister, November 15 and 21, 2013. Maurer likewise affirmed that US interests would be greatly served if it reconsidered its relationship with Beijing, bringing to bear a series of economic, political and military arguments and leaving the ambassador with the admonition that the United States should “not ignore” China. Mircea Răceanu, *Cronologie comentată a relațiilor romano-americane* [Annotated Chronology of Romanian-American Relations], Bucharest, Silex, p. 196. For Foreign Minister Manescu’s earlier discussion of China with Secretary Rusk in December 1964 see Department of State, *Secretary’s Memoranda of Conversation*: Lot 65 D 330. Confidential, referenced in footnote #1, Document 146 in *FRUS, 1964–1968, Volume XVII, Eastern Europe*.

⁵⁵ *Memorandum of Conversation*, October 14, 1965, Document 168, *FRUS 1964-1968, Volume III, Vietnam, June-December 1965*.

the beginning of a longer discussion on Vietnam.⁵⁶ However, Rusk's request for assistance in transmitting signals from Hanoi is quite clear:

The Foreign Minister said that one of his [Rusk's] colleagues had suggested that, in view of Rumania's relations with Hanoi, it should try to do something. Mr. Manescu had replied that in his view a solution could be reached only by direct talks and that Rumania could not act as a mediator. The Secretary said that we have our own contacts with Hanoi and he was not asking Mr. Manescu to act as a mediator. One could never tell, however, what channel, direct or indirect, might be used. If Rumania should pick up a signal he would only ask Mr. Manescu to make sure that the signal was not blocked.⁵⁷

Shortly after the Manescu-Rusk discussion a brief but noisy campaign threatened to shut down the Romanian channel altogether. This was apparently an artifact of Romania's increasing estrangement from the rest of the Soviet bloc. Beginning in 1962, the Soviet KGB ordered the other Warsaw Pact intelligence services to stop sharing intelligence with Bucharest on the United States, China and the broader socialist community, including the North Vietnamese.⁵⁸ Consequently, as the Romanian prime minister later noted to his North Vietnamese counterpart, Bucharest "often received more information from the international press than it did from the Soviet comrades" and Romania shared "only very summary" information on their discussions in Hanoi with Moscow.⁵⁹ [\[Document 31\]](#)

A series of Romanian decisions during the early 1960s provoked Soviet animosity and prompted Moscow to take countermeasures, some of which it coordinated with the other bloc members.⁶⁰ In 1963 Bucharest shut down intelligence collaboration with the KGB and

⁵⁶ According to footnote 1 of *Memorandum of Conversation*, October 14, 1965, Document 168 in *FRUS 1964-1968*, Volume III, *Vietnam, June-December 1965*, the source text was labeled "Part I of III," with the remainder located at Department of State, Central Files, POL 27 VIET S. Secret; Limdis.

⁵⁷ Ibid. Rusk's "colleague" may have been out-going Ambassador Crawford, who did not attend the meeting. His replacement, Ambassador Richard Davies, did.

⁵⁸ See e.g. Ladislav Bittman, *The Deception Game: Czechoslovak Intelligence in Soviet Political Warfare*, Syracuse, Syracuse University Research Corporation, 1972, p. 146; Josef Frolik testimony before US Congress, Senate Committee on the Judiciary, *Communist Bloc Intelligence Activities in the United States*, Washington D.C., US Government Printing Office, 1975; Jan Sejna, *We Will Bury You*, London, Sedgwick and Jackson, 1982, p. 66; Ladislav Bittman, *The KGB and Soviet Disinformation: An Insider's View*, Washington, Pergamon-Brassey's, 1985, pp. 32-33.

⁵⁹ However, when Soviet support (or neutrality) was vital to the success of its efforts Bucharest could be quite forthcoming. This was the case, for example, after the visit to Hanoi in September 1967, when Maurer and Niculescu-Mizil briefed Mikhail Suslov in Moscow. ANR, Fond C.C. al P.C.R., Secția Relații Externe, dosar 82/1976, f. 112-122.

⁶⁰ Countermeasures against Romania were first instituted in 1962 because of its warming relations with the United States and China. See e.g. Bittman (1972), pp. 144, 146-147, 185; Josef Frolik testimony before US Congress, Senate Committee on the Judiciary, *Communist Bloc Intelligence Activities in the United States*, Washington D.C., US Government Printing Office, 1975. See also Jan Sejna, *We Will Bury You*, London,

the other Warsaw Pact security services and tore a hole in the electronic barrier that protected the USSR and its partners from Western radio transmissions by unilaterally withdrawing from the Soviet jamming network.⁶¹ It also reversed the *russification* policies Stalin had imposed on the country after the war (closing Soviet “cultural” institutions, ending the obligatory study of Russian and resurrecting “bourgeois” historiography, etc.)⁶²

In August 1963, the controversial KGB defector Anatoliy Golitsyn returned from a hiatus in Great Britain having “remembered” that the Sino-Soviet split was false and Romanian independence “a myth.”⁶³ As one observer commented: “It was as if, having established his bona fides during his first stay in the United States,” Golitsyn now “returned to carry out his disinformation mission.”⁶⁴ By late 1963 Soviet bloc diplomats in Washington were approaching US opinion-makers with tales of Romanian unreliability and treachery, and otherwise “trash talking” that country’s dealings with the United States.⁶⁵

Soviet-Romanian tensions reached new heights in 1964-1965, first with Bucharest’s “declaration of independence,” which explicitly and very publicly rejected Moscow’s “leading role,” and then with its equally public advocacy of radical reform in the Warsaw Pact.⁶⁶ While Warsaw and Budapest always coordinated their “peace efforts” with Moscow,

Sedgwick and Jackson, 1982, p. 66-68, 75-76. Soviet defector Arkady Shevchenko traces the break to 1960, in *Breaking with Moscow*, Alfred A. Knopf, New York, 1985, pp. 97.

⁶¹ Larry L. Watts, *With Friends Like These: The Soviet Bloc’s Clandestine War Against Romania*, Bucharest, Military Publishing House, 2010, ch. 8 “Shutting Down Soviet Intelligence Networks 1956-1963” and 12 “Genesis of Coordinated Anti-Romanian Active Measures,” pp. 183-207, 272-299; Georg Herbstritt, “Eine fiendliches Bruderland: Rumänien im Blick der DDR-Staatssicherheit” [An Enemy Fraternal Country: Romania As Perceived By GDR-State Security], *Halbjahresschrift für südosteuropäische Geschichte, Literatur und Politik* (Berlin), no. 1 (May 2004); *Central Intelligence Bulletin: Daily Brief*, 9 August 1963: 7.

⁶² See e.g. *Central Intelligence Bulletin: Daily Brief*, 13 September 1963; and William A. Crawford, recorded interview by William W. Moss, 12 March 1971, pp. 12, 15-16, 28-33, John F. Kennedy Library Oral History. See also Larry L. Watts, *Divided Loyalties Within The Bloc: Romanian Objection To Soviet Informal Controls, 1963-1964*, Cold War International History Project e-Dossier No. 42, Woodrow Wilson International Center, October 2013b, <http://www.wilsoncenter.org/publication/divided-loyalties-within-the-bloc-romanian-objection-to-soviet-informal-controls-1963>.

⁶³ Anatoliy Golitsyn, *New Lies for Old: An Ex-KGB Officer Warns How Communist Deception Threatens survival of the West*, New York, Dodd, Mead & Co, 1984, pp. 83-84, 90, 184, 187, 190, 194. The KGB officer had originally defected in 1961 and then, frustrated because he was not allowed to advise President Kennedy directly, left the US for Great Britain in March 1963 only to return that August.

⁶⁴ David C. Martin, *Wilderness of Mirrors*, Guildford, CT, The Lyons Press, 2003, pp. 203-207.

⁶⁵ Hungarian and Polish diplomats disseminated such disinformation to *New York Times* journalist Tad Szulc. Memorandum of US Department of State Deputy Director for Intelligence and Research, George C. Denny, Jr., for Governor Harriman, Subject: *Soviet Attitude on Rumanian Contacts with the West*, June 3, 1964. Harriman Papers, Box 98, Folder 3, Manuscript Division, US Library of Congress, Washington, D.C. Observers viewed the “unconcealed dislike in the other satellites for the Romanians” as driven by “envy and distrust” rather than Soviet direction. Jess Gordon, “Will The Soviet Empire Crumble? Moscow is Losing Her Grip on Eastern Europe and Romania is the Key,” *Parade Magazine*, November 27, 1964, p. 10.

⁶⁶ “Rumanian party declares its right to act independently within the Communist world” in *Central Intelligence Bulletin: Current Intelligence Relating to National Security*, CIA, April 29, 1964, pp. 4-6; CIA, “Special Report: Rumania’s Position In The Soviet Bloc,” Office of Current Intelligence, May 15, 1964; *Telegram From the Legation in Romania to the Department of State*, May 12, 1964, Document 141 in *FRUS, 1964-1968*,

Romanian efforts were both genuinely independent and sincerely resented in the Kremlin.⁶⁷ Against this backdrop, reports were circulated from Vienna at the end of November 1965 that Romania had publicly claimed for itself the role of authorized mediator in the war, prompting an official US denial.⁶⁸ According to the State Department press officer:

Since Romania maintains diplomatic relations with Hanoi, we have, of course, discussed the Vietnamese situation with the Romanian Government, just as we have with many other Governments. We have consistently made clear that we welcome any advice or information that the Romanian Government might offer with regard to a settlement in Vietnam. However, the Romanian Government has not been acting as a mediator. Nor has it, to our knowledge, sought such a role.⁶⁹

Austrian inquiries later revealed that no such affirmations had been made and that the original source of the report, an Austrian journalist, made the story up out of whole cloth. According to the Austrian Chancellor, “in the four hours of his discussions with Maurer the question of mediation was not mentioned” at all. The chief of the Austrian Federal Chancellery likewise described the tale as started by “a reporter who had heard several of Maurer’s statements on Vietnam,” although other journalists “who had heard Maurer on the same occasions had not confirmed this conclusion.”⁷⁰

In fact, Maurer was one of the architects of the policy formally rejecting the role of “mediator” because the expectations that the label created were dysfunctional to mediation.

Volume XVII, *Eastern Europe*; and CIA, *Intelligence Memorandum: Military Aspects of Rumania’s Independent Policy Within the Warsaw Pact*, Top Secret, SR IM 67-4, August 25, 1967. See also Max Frankel, “Rumanians Widen Independent Line: Seek ‘Spiritual’ Tie to West – Even Hint at Claim to a Soviet Border Area,” *New York Times*, 19 December 1964, pages 1, 4; and “Hint of Warsaw Pact Split Is Seen in Rumanian Stand,” *The New York Times*, 14 May 1966, pp. 1, 4, 5.

⁶⁷ Hershberg, “Who Murdered Marigold,” (2000), p. 12. By 1968 East bloc intelligence defectors confirmed that “Soviet-bloc countries with the exception of Romania do not exercise foreign policies independent of the Soviet Union” and that Moscow was given no access to the details of Romanian foreign policy, which “remain locked in Bucharest.” See e.g. Bittman (1972), p. 89; Bittman (1985), pp. 32-33; *Note on Issues in Romanian-Soviet Relations Prepared by the Romanian Side for the Conversations in Moscow*, July 6, 1964, History and Public Policy Program Digital Archive, ANIC, Fond C.C. al P.C.R., Secția Relații Externe, dosar 36/1964, filele 9-13; Document No. 3 in Buga (2012), pp. 32-36. Translated by Larry L. Watts and published in CWIHP e-Dossier No. 42. <http://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/117991>.

⁶⁸ See e.g. “Rumanian Leader Said to Be Seeking Talks On Vietnam” and “Both Hanoi and Washington Are Credited With Request That Bucharest Act,” *New York Times*, 22 November 1965, pages 1, 3. See also *Die Presse* (Vienna), November 22 and November 23, 1965. The initial report, citing unnamed “Austrian diplomats” and “authoritative sources” in Vienna appeared on Sunday morning while Maurer and the Austrian chancellor were on a hunting trip and unable to respond. In the following days the media cited unnamed “Romanian sources.”

⁶⁹ John W. Finney, “Washington Denies Rumania Is Acting As Mediator in War,” *New York Times*, 23 November 1965, pages 1, 11; “State Department Denies Rumanians Are War Mediators,” *Washington Post, Times Herald*, November 23, 1965, p. 10.

⁷⁰ *Memorandum of Conversation*, Washington, November 29, 1965, 11:30 a.m., Document 198 in *Foreign Relations Of The United States, 1964–1968* Volume XVII, *Eastern Europe*.

Responsible Romanian officials never claimed to act as neutral “mediator,” they facilitated contacts as friends of both parties. The campaign, which temporarily rendered Romania radioactive for Washington, coincided with Budapest’s announcement that “Hungary is taking steps through diplomatic channels and the communist party to promote a peaceful solution in Southeast Asia.”⁷¹

The “Austrian affair” coincided with the third serious US-Romanian exchange on Vietnam back in Bucharest. At the beginning of November, some three weeks since the Rusk-Manescu discussions in New York, President Johnson requested that Senate Majority Leader Mike Mansfield head up a bipartisan fact-finding tour of Southeast Asia, with visits to the potentially most significant intermediaries for help in resolving the conflict: France, Poland, the USSR and Romania.⁷² Mansfield was a bona fide Asia specialist, having taught history of the region as a university professor in the 1930s and leading Congressional fact-finding mission for various presidents since 1944.⁷³

As Maurer and Manescu were still in Austria, the Mansfield mission met during November 20-24 with Deputy Prime Minister Gheorghe Apostol, Romanian parliamentary head (and Mansfield’s ostensible counterpart) Stefan Voitec and, separately, with Deputy Foreign Minister Gheorghe Macovescu, highly regarded in Washington as the former Legation Chief when the first Romanian-American accords were signed in 1960.⁷⁴ Macovescu would later become the principal emissary to Hanoi and Washington by the end of 1967.⁷⁵

⁷¹ Rather obviously contrasting a “serious” effort with Romania’s, the main Austrian daily reported the Romanian affair within an article entitled “Ungarn als Vermittler: Budapest will friedliche Lösung in Südostasien fördern” [Hungary As Intermediary: Budapest Wishes to Promote a Peaceful Solution in Southeast Asia], *Die Presse*, November 22, 1965. The *New York Times* reported that the Hungarian communist party “announced Saturday that it had taken steps through diplomatic and party channels for peace in Southeast Asia” within its article on Romanian mediation. *New York Times*, November 22, 1965.

⁷² William Krasser, “Rumania Seen in Viet Peace Role; Talks Coincide With Mansfield Visit,” *Washington Post Herald Tribune*, November 22, 1965, p. 1; *The Vietnam Conflict: The Substance And The Shadow*, Report of Senator Mike Mansfield, Senator Edmund S. Muskie, Senator Daniel K. Inouye, Senator George D. Aiken, and Senator J. Caleb Boggs to the Committee on Foreign Relations United States Senate, Washington, D.C.: US Government Printing Office, January 6, 1966. The trip was actually an initiative of Mansfield, but Johnson agreed to sponsor it in November.

⁷³ See e.g. Don Oberdorfer, *Senator Mansfield*, Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Books, 2003; Gregory A. Olson, *Mansfield and Vietnam: A Study in Rhetorical Adaptation*, East Lansing, MI: Michigan State University Press, 1995.

⁷⁴ Just a few days before Mansfield’s arrival, Apostol hosted a delegation of the National Liberation Front of South Vietnam. *Radio Bucharest*, November 16, 1965; “Senator Mansfield to Bucharest” and “Maurer’s Visit to Austria,” *Radio Free Europe Research (RFER)*, *East Europe*, Romanian Situation Report, November 17, 1965, pp. 1-3 and “Senator Mansfield in Bucharest” and “Maurer Returns from Austria,” *RFER*, *East Europe*, Romanian Situation Report, November 24, 1965, pp. 1-3.

⁷⁵ Indeed, Macovescu’s ability and past history with the United States was a contributing factor to the limitation of US focus and awareness of the Romanian channel to the period of his most evident involvement, roughly coinciding with the *PACKERS* channel as identified in the *Pentagon Papers*.

Neither the Mansfield-Apostol nor the Mansfield-Macovescu discussions have as yet surfaced in the Romanian or US archives.⁷⁶ However, judging from Mansfield's report to President Johnson after his return, the American senator saw eye-to-eye with the Romanians on key issues regarding the nature of the conflict, the common identity of the Vietnamese people in both North and South, and the improbability of success for any externally imposed military solution.⁷⁷ [Documents 6, 23] As it turned out, the Mansfield mission had marginal impact because its conclusions ran counter to administration policies and were thus rejected by Johnson.⁷⁸

Moscow and its subordinate partners continued to attack the credibility of Romania as go-between well beyond the time frame of this study. As President Johnson later remarked in a masterpiece of understatement, it was "probable that Moscow knows the channel and does not particularly like it."⁷⁹ Responding to Kosygin's allegation that the Romanian channel was not to be trusted and that no one in Hanoi took them seriously, Johnson observed that "we have every reason to believe that we are in such contact with [Prime Minister] Pham Van Dong and [Nguyen Duy] Trinh, the Foreign Minister" through the Romanians, deriving "both from internal evidence in what has allegedly been said and from external evidence in the consistency between what has been said privately, what has been said publicly by Hanoi and by reasonable interpretations of a great deal of diplomatic gossip in a number of capitals involving Hanoi's representatives."⁸⁰

In fact, Romania had been a party to the debate over the utility and advisability of negotiations involving the Democratic Republic of Vietnam (DRV), the People's Republic of

⁷⁶ That said, there may be further materials on the Romanian discussions at Lyndon Baines Johnson Presidential Library, National Security File, International Meetings and Travel File, "Senator Mansfield's Trip (Southeast Asia)"; and George D. Aikens Papers, Special Collections, The University of Vermont Libraries, Collection "South East Asia – Europe Nov.–Dec. 1965," especially "Reports: 'Memories of the Mansfield Mission': Briefing Papers -Vietnam Conflict Galley 1965," and "Rumania-Background Information Nov. 19-20, 1965," Crate 33, Carton 3, Folder 22 and Carton 3A, Folder 8, respectively.

⁷⁷ See e.g., *The Vietnam Conflict: The Substance And The Shadow*, Mansfield et. al (1966); *Memorandum From Senator Mike Mansfield To President Johnson*, Washington, December 18, 1965, Document 233 in *Foreign Relations Of The United States, 1964–1968, Volume III, Vietnam, June–December 1965*. Ceausescu informed the Soviets on November 23, 1965 that the Mansfield mission "explained especially how they see the problems in Vietnam. We presented them our point of view and gave them the communiqué signed by us with the Vietnamese only the day before. We explained that they must understand the Vietnamese, that we completely support the Vietnamese position; that, of course, the current situation worries us since their actions present a danger for all humanity and that we are in full accord with the Vietnamese position as to the only way of resolving the situation. They told us that they knew our position, that they had seen the communiqué already and that it is clear to them." ANR, Fond C.C. al P.C.R., Secția Relații Externe, dosar 55/1966, f. 13.

⁷⁸ Oberdorfer (2003).

⁷⁹ *Telegram From President Johnson to Prime Minister Wilson*, Washington, January 24, 1968, 0530Z, Document 24, *Foreign Relations, 1964-1968, Volume VI, Vietnam, January-August 1968*.

⁸⁰ Ibid. Johnson noted as "perhaps more ominous" the fact "that Moscow may be playing a spoiling game in Hanoi because of their irritations with the present procedure."

China (PRC) and the USSR – with the other bloc members following the Soviet lead – since at least March 1965. Bucharest first broached the topic of negotiations with unreceptive Chinese and Vietnamese leaders on the occasion of the March funeral of Romanian Party leader Gheorghe Gheorghiu-Dej and then again in July 1965, at the 9th Plenum of the Romanian Communist Party, which focused on the negotiated resolution of international tensions and conflict.⁸¹ [[Documents 1, 3, 4, 5](#)]

By August, Bucharest's advocacy raised enough concern among Chinese leaders that Beijing issued instructions to discourage “primarily Romania and other left fraternal socialist countries” from pursuing a negotiated end to the conflict.⁸² The danger, Beijing underscored, was that Hanoi “never completely closed the door on peace talks, thus creating an opportunity for imperialism, revisionism, and reactionaries ... to pressure the DRV to open peace negotiations.”⁸³ Despite Chinese efforts at dissuasion, by the end of 1965 Bucharest was aggressively seeking an audience with the leadership in Hanoi for this very purpose.

The Romanian Channel in 1966

Since the American request in October 1965 the Romanians had been attempting to persuade US authorities to reconsider their positions regarding both the nature of the conflict in Vietnam and their antagonism towards China, while considering ways of drawing Hanoi onto a path that might lead it to the negotiating table.⁸⁴ By January 1966 the authorities in Bucharest had decided to involve Romania officially in the search to peace, primarily in order to prevent the realization of their worst-case scenarios – an extension of the war that would draw in the Warsaw Pact members and/or the escalation of the war into a nuclear conflict.⁸⁵

⁸¹ Whether Romanian insistence on a greater diplomatic effort during its exchanges with DRV officials in March had any impact on the Vietnamese Workers Party discussion at that time is still an open question. See *Resolution of the 11 Plenum (Special Session) of the Party Central Committee (Third Congress) On the Immediate Situation and Urgent Responsibilities*, 25-27 March 1965, in Merle Pribbenow, *North Vietnam's "Talk-Fight" Strategy and the 1968 Peace Negotiations with the United States*, CWIHP e-dossier No. 33, Woodrow Wilson Center, April 16, 2012, <https://www.wilsoncenter.org/publication/north-vietnams-talk-fight-strategy-and-the-1968-peace-negotiations-the-united-states>.

⁸² Chinese Foreign Ministry Circular, 3 August 1965, Document 1 in Qiang Zhai, *Beijing and the Vietnam Peace Talks, 1965-1968: New Evidence from Chinese Sources*, Working Paper no. 18, Cold War International History Project, June 1997, p. 26.

⁸³ Chinese Foreign Ministry Circular, “Vietnam ‘Peace Talk’ Activities,” 19 August 1965, Document 3 in Zhai (1997), p. 32.

⁸⁴ Romania lobbied persistently for a reconsideration of US policy toward China. An unpublished Rusk-Manescu discussion on China is at Department of State, Secretary's Memoranda of Conversation: Lot 65 D 330. Confidential, cited in *Memorandum of Conversation*, New York, December 3, 1964, noon, Document 146 in *FRUS 1964-1968*, Volume XVII, *Eastern Europe*. For the Romanian record of this discussion on China see ANR, Fond C.C. al P.C.R., Secția Relații Externe, dosar 45/1964, file 4-15.

⁸⁵ Along with becoming the bloc's foremost proponent of nuclear disarmament Romania also tried to impose a “two-key” NATO-type arrangement to prevent Soviet nuclear launches from the territory of its allies. As a

For its part, Washington continued to solicit Bucharest's input on the problem, for example, by sending the message through the US ambassador at the beginning of January that it "would like to know the opinion of the Romanian government on this issue, as well as any suggestions that contribute to a peaceful resolution of the situation in Vietnam."⁸⁶ As Ceausescu declared to the RCP Presidium, "We too must be preoccupied with finding solutions to prevent this war from expanding."⁸⁷

After the threats of expansion and nuclear escalation, Bucharest was most concerned about Soviet attempts to railroad the Vietnamese into negotiations in much the same manner as Moscow sought to impose its control over the policies of allies and clients. As Ceausescu stated to the top leadership of the RCP in mid-January 1966:

It does seem clear to me that [Moscow's] purpose is to bring China and Vietnam and pressure them to accept negotiations. By coincidence, this happens at the same time as the US peace offensive, as Harriman's visit to Warsaw and to Saigon, as Shelepin's visit to the DRV, etc. Maybe there was collusion in these actions; maybe it is just coincidence.⁸⁸

To Bucharest this smacked of the sort of great power collusion that diminished and even negated the independence of smaller states. The Romanians were by now quite familiar with Moscow's practice of conducting meetings with loyalist partners about which Bucharest would not be informed, much less invited, and after which the other bloc members would attempt to impose their decisions as *fait accompli*.⁸⁹ During the first half of 1966 Bucharest worked diligently to prevent this by ensuring that Hanoi retained its decision making authority over all peace initiatives generated within the socialist camp, despite Soviet preferences to the contrary. [[Documents 8](#), [9](#), [10](#), [12](#), [13](#), [14](#)]

Romanian official explained to an American journalist: "We want to avoid a situation like the Cuban crisis of 1962 in which foreign missiles could be fired from our territory without our consent." Peter Grosse, "Rumania Opposes Soviet on Control of Armies," *New York Times*, 18 May 1966, p. 2.

⁸⁶ *Note Referring to Audience of US Ambassador in Bucharest, Richard Davis, with Deputy Foreign Minister Goerge Macovescu, in the Course of which the American Position on Vietnam was Presented*, 3 January 1966, ANR, Fond C.C. al P.C.R., Secția Cancelarie, dosar 71/1966, file 30-34. Davis presented Johnson's 14 points and informed Bucharest the US had halted the bombing and was awaiting some response from Hanoi.

⁸⁷ *Notes from the 19 January 1966 Permanent Presidium of the Romanian Communist Party*, 16 January 1966, in ANR, RCP Chancellery Files, 5/1966, pp. 12-13 as cited in Munteanu (2012): 72.

⁸⁸ *Ibid*, p. 11 as cited in Munteanu (2012): 72.

⁸⁹ According to one Soviet advisor, the Soviet International Department chief routinely gathered his East European counterparts to "teach them how to rebut" Romanian arguments: "I remember in Poland, at night before Warsaw we were in some old castle from the Mickiewicz era, we met secretly [apart] from the Romanian delegation to conspire!" *The Diary of Anatoly S. Chernyaev 1991*, The National Security Archive, 2011, entry for October 20, 1991, <http://nsarchive.gwu.edu/NSAEBB/NSAEBB345/index.htm>.

Paradoxically, by March 1966, the same Soviet leadership that sought to undermine Romanian credibility as an intermediary for the United States was itself requesting Bucharest's assistance in dealing with a cantankerous China and in moving Hanoi towards negotiations. The extent of Moscow's frustration with the Chinese was vividly reflected in the desperate plea for Romania's help from Soviet Politburo member (and former KGB chief) Aleksandr Shelepin:

They denigrate us; they maintain that we have allied ourselves with the American imperialists. It is a very difficult situation. Sincerely speaking, we see no possibilities whatsoever, at least not for the immediate future. ... We do not know what to do. Maybe you can give us some advice; maybe you have some constructive proposals to make. For our part, we are ready to examine any proposals. I am speaking seriously; maybe you have some advice, proposals. [[Document 14](#)]

Concurrently, Bucharest was lobbying other leaderships, including those of NATO members and neutral states, to help dissuade Washington from its fundamentally illusory policy and better inform it as to the real state of affairs in Vietnam and within the socialist camp. [[Documents 16, 22, 24](#)] That same March, VWP leader Le Duan finally confirmed the first senior level Romanian visit to Hanoi for April, subsequently rescheduled for May.⁹⁰

Romanian First Deputy Prime Minister Emil Bodnaras led the delegation to Hanoi for the May 6-10 talks. The Romanians had been making "suggestions" on their home turf regarding the advisability of greater diplomatic efforts and the advantages of negotiations to visiting senior-level Vietnamese representatives since at least the end of 1965. [[Document 7](#)] This was no easy matter after Moscow's ham-handed advocacy of "unconditional negotiations" in February 1965, which echoed the thinly disguised American invitations to capitulation.⁹¹ Indeed, the North Vietnamese and especially the Chinese had been insistent in their rejection of negotiations to the Romanians in March, July and October 1965, and the Chinese were almost obsessive in their references to Soviet advocacy of "unconditional"

⁹⁰ Le Duan explained that the VWP's CC Plenum and participation in the Moscow Party Congress had delayed the process. ANR, Fond C.C. al P.C.R., Secția Relații Externe, dosar 27/1966, f. 1-4.

⁹¹ Under Secretary Ball noted at the time that "we were following the traditional pattern for negotiating with a mule: just keep hitting him on the head with a two-by-four until he does what you want him to do." George W. Ball, *The Past Has Another Pattern*, New York, W. W. Norton and Company, 1982, p. 405.

negotiations in February 1965 as if it were the original sin in 1966 as well.⁹² [[Documents 1, 3, 4, 5, 26](#)]

If the Romanian delegation raised the issue of greater political efforts and the advantages of negotiation in Hanoi, those topics were so poorly received that all mention of it was excised from the official transcript (which they reportedly shared with Hanoi and Beijing). A primary goal of the visit was to identify any opportunities for moving Hanoi in the direction of negotiation. But, as Bodnaras informed the RCP's Executive Committee shortly after his return, there was "no other action that elicits more sensitivity and more immediate reaction than the smallest attempt to find a mediated [settlement] between [the Vietnamese] and the American aggressors. They are ready to talk about anything, but not that."⁹³

Instead, the delegation focused on issues of unambiguously common interest: bloc solidarity, national control of decision-making, and real equality within the socialist camp. This was a "win-win" for the Romanians. Bucharest's foreign policy depended on relatively smooth relations within the socialist camp, relatively peaceful interstate relations worldwide, and the respect of large and great powers for the sovereignty and independence of smaller states. Hanoi held all of these issues as critical not only to their war effort but to their survival as well. Romania's approach was both unique within the Soviet bloc and uniquely suited to Vietnamese concerns, thereby granting Bucharest some measure of influence with the DRV leadership. [[Document 17, 20](#)]

On 27 May, 1966, seventeen days after the delegation left the Democratic Republic of Vietnam, Deputy Prime Minister Bodnaras personally briefed the US Ambassador, Richard Davis. Bodnaras was one of the three most senior and influential leaders in Romania – along with Nicolae Ceausescu and Ion Gheorghe Maurer – and easily its foremost authority on military and security affairs. He shared Romanian assessments of the conflict and the probable Vietnamese reaction to US policy and initiatives, underscoring the mismatch between US planning and Vietnamese realities. Unfortunately, the ambassador's report on

⁹² See, for example, *Stenographic Transcript of Ceaușescu-Deng Conversation*, July 26, 1965, "National Collections: Romania," Parallel History Project on European Security, <http://www.php.isn.ethz.ch/collections/colltopic.cfm?lng=en&id=16325&navinfo=15342>

⁹³ *Minutes of Conversation of the Meeting of the RCP Executive Committee*, May 17, 1966, 1800 hrs, ANR (formerly ANIC), RCP Chancellery Files, 77/1966, p. 22 as reproduced in Munteanu (2012): 73.

that briefing was not included in the *Pentagon Papers* nor has it been reproduced by the State Department.⁹⁴ [[Document 23](#)]

The two and a half week delay between the Romanian delegation's departure from Hanoi and the briefing to US officials became the standard turn-around time for all such exchanges throughout 1966-1968.⁹⁵ This delay was due in part to the four-day travel time from Hanoi via Beijing/Nanning and Moscow to Bucharest. It was also due to the intervening briefings given along the way to Chinese and Soviet authorities, each usually lasting a day although briefings in the PRC tended to run over multiple days and even through an entire week. Over the course of the remaining week/week and a half the delegation would brief the top RCP leadership, which in turn evaluated the results of the discussions. Next steps were subsequently decided in separate meetings of the Presidium and Political Executive Committee. Despite international press speculation during May and June 1966, the existence of this channel was not acknowledged by the US administration at the time.⁹⁶

In contrast, the *Pentagon Papers* date the initiation of the Romanian channel to a 22 October, 1966 discussion between the US permanent representative to the United Nations in New York, Arthur Goldberg, and visiting Romanian Foreign Minister Corneliu Manescu.⁹⁷ In fact, Bucharest had been working on the problem by then for at least a year and a half, a year of which at specific American request. Aside from ascertaining the positions of Hanoi, Washington and Beijing vis-à-vis negotiations, much of the previous nine months was spent attempting to repair the damage done to the very idea of negotiations by previous Soviet

⁹⁴ Davis references the briefing in his report of January 23, 1967, Document 154 in *FRUS 1964-1968, Volume XVII, Eastern Europe*. Unpublished still, the Davis report was sent to the Secretary of State as Bucharest 1095, May 27, 1966 (in Department of State, Central Files, POL 27 VIET S).

⁹⁵ Romanian turnaround times varied from two weeks to nineteen days. The delays associated with the Hanoi visits during the Johnson administration were as follows: May 1966 (17 days), October 1966 (18 days), October 1967 (14 days), December 1967 (19 days) and January 1968 (15 days). The *Pentagon Papers* erroneously suggested the delay following the January 1968 visit was inordinately, and therefore suspiciously, long when in fact it was among the shortest, despite the intervening Tet offensive. The error reappears as "ripple effect" in secondary works. See e.g., "The Rumanians left Hanoi on January 28, but for some unknown reason a report on their talks was not transmitted to Washington until February 12." Hershberg (2012), p. 200.

⁹⁶ As noted, the *Pentagon Papers* did reference articles on Romania's effort in May-June 1966 in Part VI.A. ("Negotiations 1965-1967: The Public Record," p. 22) but then ignored them in its treatment of the Romanian track in Part VI.C.4. One reported the May visit to Hanoi, Beijing and Moscow and the fact of Le Duan's discussion with Emil Bodnarus (*Newsweek*, June 6, 1966). The other cited Romanian efforts "to persuade Peking to accept negotiations on Vietnam with the United States" (*Le Monde*, May 31, 1966). Both were essentially correct. The *Pentagon Papers* ignored other reporting along the same lines. See e.g. William H. Stringer, "Viet Peace Bid Hinted in Romanian Visits," *Christian Science Monitor*, May 13, 1966; David K. Willis, "Hanoi Peace Feeler in Romania," *Christian Science Monitor*, June 2, 1966.

⁹⁷ *Pentagon Papers* (1997), Part VI. C. 4, pp. 248-250. The Pentagon referred to Romanian exchanges between October 1966 and November 1967 as "contacts" rather than as an on-going "track" or "channel."

efforts to push Hanoi into talks against its will.⁹⁸ [[Documents 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 16, 29](#)] On 12 August, 1966, as a result of their exchanges with American interlocutors, US allies, neutral states and other Pact members shortly before and after their May visit to Hanoi, Bucharest requested a second meeting “between the party and state leaderships of Romania and Vietnam.” [[Documents 16, 22, 24, 25](#)]

As in October 1965, something in the intervening US-Romanian exchanges since May again drew Washington’s interest. That August the State Department asked the leadership in Romania to receive the US permanent representative to the United Nations, Ambassador Goldberg, in order to discuss possible paths to a peaceful resolution of the Vietnam War.⁹⁹ Bucharest immediately approved the US request. [[Documents 33, 34](#)]

Goldberg’s trip was originally to include Poland, Yugoslavia and Bulgaria. The Poles demurred, preferring to meet in New York, and Tito flat out refused, claiming to be otherwise occupied, while Sofia delayed its lukewarm response until the beginning of September.¹⁰⁰ Although Goldberg expressed his willingness to travel only to Romania, in the end, last-minute complications on the US side scotched the planned September visit. Goldberg-Manescu conversations resumed in the Romanian offices at the UN in New York that September-October. Although Rusk and Goldberg raised the topic of rescheduling the visit during their 5 October discussion with Manescu, it would be another year before a senior member of the “negotiations team” traveled to Romania.

Interestingly, Secretary Rusk bypassed Goldberg and sent messages to Manescu in May while the Romanian delegation was in Hanoi. Relaying those messages in the midst of that visit, basically restatements of US conditions for negotiations obviously meant to influence the terms of the Romanian-Vietnamese discussions, almost certainly would have branded Romania an American advocate and agent in Hanoi’s eyes. The Romanian embassy in Hanoi was thus instructed not to transmit the message to the North Vietnamese until the delegation had left. [[Documents 18, 19](#)]

⁹⁸ Hanoi complained to Bucharest of these Soviet bloc efforts in May 1965 but Romanian attempts to persuade the other bloc members that those efforts were wrongheaded appear to have begun only after October 1965 (from January 1966 especially), i.e., after Rusk (and Shelepin) requested Romanian help.

⁹⁹ Harriman’s “Negotiations Committee” thought it useful to brief Goldberg on their “3-Track” paper on negotiations, “setting down the fundamental elements of our thinking about the problems and possibilities of a negotiated settlement in Vietnam,” before his “proposed trip to Eastern Europe.” *Memorandum of Meeting of the Negotiations Committee*, Washington, August 18, 1966, 4:30 p.m., Document 212 in *Foreign Relations Of The United States, 1964–1968 Volume IV, Vietnam*, 1966.

¹⁰⁰ According to the Romanian *Note of Conversation*, “Goldberg asserted that the response of Romania was the most prompt and the only one that was completely positive.” [[Document 33](#)]

The May and October discussions in Hanoi were extraordinary for their frequency and level of access to the senior DRV leadership. In May, over three and half days, Bodnaras and CC Secretary for Foreign Relations Paul Niculescu-Mizil participated in six separate meetings, two of which were restricted, as well as a lengthy “non-meeting” from which even the translators were excluded. Four meetings were held with Prime Minister Pham Van Dong; Foreign Minister (and Deputy PM) Nguyen Duy Trinh; Deputy Prime Minister Le Thanh Nghi; Politburo member Hoang Van Hoan; VWP CC Secretary Nguyen Van Tran; Deputy Defense Minister Tran Quy Hai; Deputy Foreign Minister Hoang Van Tien; and DRV Ambassador to Romania Hoang Tu. The “restricted” meetings included only Pham Van Dong, Trinh and Nghi while the “non-meeting” conversation was held with Pham Van Dong alone and in French. [[Documents 17, 20](#)]

Romanian archives may yet yield further details given that the transcript reproduced here does not include any note of the delegation’s three meetings with President Ho Chi Minh: the first on the night of their arrival when Ho and the entire Politburo of the Vietnamese Workers Party came to the Romanian residence; the second when Ho attended a reception held by the Romanians; and the third, during a 4-5 hour dinner party in their honor at Ho Chi Minh’s home before their departure. [[Document 20](#)] Likewise absent from this transcript are the private discussions between Romanian Defense Minister Ion Ionita and his Vietnamese counterpart, General Vo Nguyen Giap. The transcript does, however, make reference to the Romanian intention of supplying the arms and equipment for a Vietnamese battalion. [[Document 17](#)]

Aside from level of access the October 1966 meetings were also extraordinary in that both Beijing and, to a lesser degree, Hanoi had discouraged the Romanians from undertaking them at all. Pursuant to Vietnamese request, the October visit of Prime Minister Ion Gheorghe Maurer and Paul Niculescu-Mizil was not only unofficial; it was *incognito*. [[Documents 15, 27](#)] In spite of this inauspicious prelude, on arrival the delegation was taken directly to the residence of Ho Chi Minh, who also held a dinner in their honor the first evening. In a further sign of respect, President Ho accompanied them to the airport on their departure. Niculescu-Mizil reported to the RCP’s Political Executive Committee after their return to Bucharest that despite its informal nature, the protocol extended their delegation exceeded that given by the Vietnamese to the first-ever official visit of Czechoslovakia’s Prime Minister, concluded only shortly before their arrival. [[Documents 30, 31, 32, 37, 38](#)]

Maurer and Niculescu-Mizil met for two days of substantive discussion with Pham Van Dong, Trinh and head of the VWP CC Foreign Relations section (and former foreign

minister) Xuan Thuy. Most remarkable was the three-round give and take between the two sides over the advisability of negotiations. Each round began with Vietnamese assertions that negotiations were impossible and untimely, followed by Romanian explanations as to why negotiations should be accepted, and then by Vietnamese concessions regarding the accuracy, logic and persuasiveness of Romanian arguments, only to restart the sequence in the subsequent round. During both the May and October visits, as well as subsequent visits during 1967, the Vietnamese convened their Politburo after the first set of presentations to consider Romanian arguments and formulate replies for the next stage of the discussions.

[[Documents 17](#), [30](#), [37](#)]

On 5 October, 1966, Secretary of State Rusk met with Foreign Minister Manescu to discuss a variety of topics, chief among them Vietnam. The meeting is not mentioned in the *Pentagon Papers*, which is mildly surprising given that it was a semi-public dinner Rusk hosted in his quarters at the Waldorf Astoria Hotel in New York in honor of the Romanian foreign minister. The State Department's *Foreign Relations of the United States* documentary series likewise omitted the section dealing specifically with Vietnam, only publishing "part IV of VI" dealing with largely bilateral and economic relations.¹⁰¹ That section on Vietnam is reproduced below from the Romanian note of the conversation. [[Document 34](#)]

In an unorthodox move that still requires explanation, Prime Minister Maurer's briefing on the October visit to Hanoi was delivered directly to Ambassador Goldberg on 22 October in New York rather than through the US Embassy in Bucharest. While this document has still to surface in the Romanian archive (and is not published in *FRUS*), part of the US report on the briefing is reproduced in the *Pentagon Papers*.¹⁰² However, the reproduced section begins with the US response at point "4" (and ends in ellipses), excluding Romania's presentation of its discussions with DRV leaders altogether.¹⁰³

All told, seven of the documents appended here cover the May and October discussions. These include the transcripts of both, the post-meeting briefings to Chinese and

¹⁰¹ See *Memorandum of Conversation*, New York, October 5, 1966, 8 p.m., Document 153 in *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1964-1968* Volume XVII, *Eastern Europe*. The five unpublished sections dealt with "Romanian-German relations, East-West relations, Vietnam, Manescu's travel, peacekeeping, and Cyprus" and are deposited at Department of State, Conference Files: Lot 66 D 347, CF 85. Confidential.

¹⁰² "USUN New York 1777 to SecState (SECRET-NODIS), 22 October 1966, Refs: USUN's 1764 and Deptel 691440" in the *Pentagon Papers* (1997), Part VI. C. 4, pp. 248-249. Goldberg's report on the Romanian briefing may have preceded the USUN 1777 telegram by a couple of days, given the reference to an earlier telegram – USUN 1764 – that is not reproduced in either the *Pentagon Papers* or *FRUS*.

¹⁰³ Ibid. Bucharest shared some of its conclusions with the Italians on October 20. The *Pentagon Papers* reproduces only a small excerpt from a telegram informing the US Embassy in Manila of the contact and misdating it to October 22, 1967 (page 250). The full Italian report of the contact is in Document 279 in *Foreign Relations of the United States (FRUS) 1964-1968, Volume IV, Vietnam 1966*.

Soviet leaders, the briefing given to the US ambassador in Bucharest by Bodnaras after the May visit, and an RCP CC Presidium discussion devoted to the October visits to Hanoi, Beijing and Moscow. [Documents 17, 20, 23, 30, 31, 32, 37] Ceausescu also discussed the need for more active involvement in diplomacy with Vietnamese Deputy Prime Minister Le Thanh Nghi in Bucharest the previous January and September. [Documents 7, 28] Likewise, exchanges were held with the ambassador of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam in Romania, and were occasionally substantive. [Documents 3, 25, 27]

Subsequently, Romanian authorities spoke at length with DRV Foreign Minister Trinh at the Congress of the Albanian Workers Party in Tirana (1-8 November), where the Romanians were the only members of the Soviet bloc in attendance. They had the opportunity to do so as well at the Bulgarian Communist Party Congress in Sofia (14-19 November). The record of the conversations in Tirana and Sofia has yet to surface, but in the course of these exchanges Trinh modified his schedule to include a three-day stopover in Bucharest.

Interestingly, while Pham Van Dong had informed the Romanians in October of the Polish intention to visit his country that November, Trinh apparently chose not to inform Warsaw's foreign minister that he would be making an unscheduled visit to Romania, even though the two discussed very similar topics less than 48 hours before the trip.¹⁰⁴ During an earlier stopover in Moscow on 12 November, on his way to the Bulgarian Congress, Trinh refused to be drawn out by Gromyko on granting more attention to the possibility of negotiations. He did, however, concede that Hanoi would be moving more aggressive along both military and political lines.¹⁰⁵

From Sofia, Trinh made the short flight to Bucharest for talks during November 21-23. In their discussion on 21 November, 1966, Ceausescu, Maurer, Bodnaras and Niculescu-Mizil brought forth their full array of arguments from the previous October and added several new ones, which, in their opinion, made acceptance of negotiations a time-sensitive issue whose delay would probably rebound against Vietnamese interests. As in October, Trinh conceded the logic and accuracy of Romanian arguments. This time, however, his avoidance

¹⁰⁴ Polish cable from Sofia, Bulgaria, reporting on conversation between Polish Foreign Minister Adam Rapacki and North Vietnamese foreign minister Nguyen Duy Trinh, November 19, 1966, Document 7 and Polish memorandum of conversation between Polish foreign minister Adam Rapacki and North Vietnamese foreign minister Nguyen Duy Trinh leader, Sofia, Bulgaria, November 19, 1966, Document 8 in *Cracking a Vietnam War Mystery: Evidence from James G. Hershberg, Marigold: The Lost Chance for Peace in Vietnam* (Stanford University Press/Wilson Center Press, January 2012), National Security Archive Electronic Briefing Book No. 369, January 15, 2012, http://nsarchive.gwu.edu/NSAEBB/NSAEBB369/#_ftnref22.

¹⁰⁵ Hershberg (2012), p. 219.

of commitment to implement such an approach was hedged by contrary assurances that Romanian recommendations indeed would be implemented “in the near or more distant future”. [[Document 38](#)]

Unique Aspects of Romania’s Approach

Alone within the Warsaw Pact, Romania shared a common perspective with the Vietnamese regarding (1) independent national control over foreign and security policy, (2) “people’s war,” and (3) relations with China. At the same time, Bucharest had learned several useful lessons from its experience as intermediary between Moscow and Beijing at the start of the 1960s that served it well in subsequent efforts. Among them was the utility of even the smallest of steps towards disengagement and the value of even the most modest and temporary of improvements in atmospherics, even when the situation appeared otherwise hopeless.

It was important, the Romanians had learned, to realize that intermediation by small states differed significantly from larger state endeavors. Lacking any means to enforce compromise the only effective approach for small states was to assist belligerent parties to recognize their own self-interest in negotiated solutions. And it was of overwhelming importance to be cognizant of and up front about one’s own interests in undertaking the effort in the first place. Bucharest did not present peace “packages” or comprehensive plans; it identified incremental steps for improving communication and understanding between the parties to the conflict with the aim of sitting them down face-to-face, where they could work out the important differences amongst themselves, without the inevitably distorting effect of intermediaries.

Although it was later mistakenly perceived as exploiting the differences between the United States and the Soviet Union, as well as those between the People’s Republic of China and the USSR, Romanian policy was in fact directed at diametrically opposite ends.¹⁰⁶ The basic thinking, indeed the conviction, behind it held that if all of the states were gathered around the same table then none could dominate the others. Bucharest had very little time for those states that pursued their interests by encouraging tensions between other states, and it constantly sought to combat the use of that approach by the great powers with which it wished to have functional and friendly relations.

¹⁰⁶ This may have originated with Soviet disinformation but it was fed by the seductive logic that mediators benefit from and even require tension and conflict, otherwise there would be no need for them.

Of course, this was rather standard operating procedure in great power competition, whether one labeled it “exploiting contradictions” between states (or between leaders and their societies) as did the Soviet Union, or “differentiation,” as practiced by the United States and China. The tactic was very evidently practiced by all three during the Sino-Soviet rift, while Romania was making the Sisyphean effort to ameliorate those relations. According to RCP leader Gheorghe Gheorghiu Dej:

The capitalist countries see the worsening relations between China and the Soviet Union as the basic element. They have long awaited this, they have desired it and they desire it still, and they would be stupid not to desire it. Things are developing in that direction.¹⁰⁷

The other bloc members followed Moscow’s lead in “exploiting contradictions,” and the same practice of exploiting tensions between states to further their interests held true for independent-minded Yugoslav, Albanian and North Korean leaderships, making them very problematic “allies” for Bucharest and underscoring how truly singular Romania’s foreign policy was within the socialist camp. It turns out that the relentless insistence on principle, ridiculed by Moscow, had very practical purposes. As Dej explained regarding the Sino-Soviet rift to his Political Bureau in March 1964:

If we examine things closely, we can only conclude that this fight, this sharpening of differences, is convenient for Kim Il-Sung, just as it is convenient for the Albanians and the Yugoslavs. ... Let’s not delude ourselves; the Koreans are interested in continuing the fight between the two great powers. They make their narrow-minded calculations on the basis of it. ...

Kim Il-Sung says: let these two leviathans battle each other. I do not believe that this attitude is either principled or appropriate; it is an attitude of narrow-minded interest. I have observed the same attitude also among the Yugoslavs, one should make peace but not on the backs of others because, unfortunately, the same thing might happen to you.¹⁰⁸

Maurer concurred, as did the rest of RCP’s political leadership:

¹⁰⁷ “Meeting of Political Bureau of the RWP of the CC, 31-31 March 1964 (30 March 1964),” reproduced as *Protocol of Two Meetings of the Politburo of the Romanian Workers’ Party*, Courtesy of Parallel History Project on European Cooperation (PHP), www.php.isn.ethz.ch, by permission of the Center for Security Studies at ETH Zurich on behalf of the PHP network (Hereafter: PHP), p. 20.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid, pp. 26, 29.

Regarding Kim Il-Sung, you cannot rely on anything he says. He says, “we are against public polemics,” and then after we left he published polemical materials. ... Kim Il-Sung was in agreement on ending the polemic, he agreed with our action, and after that he went ahead and published the polemical articles anyway. You can see how ‘sincere’ he was.¹⁰⁹

(1) Independent vs. Subordinate Foreign and Security Policies

Romania’s independent foreign and security policy had set it well apart from the rest of the Soviet bloc by 1963. In that year, for instance, Bucharest signaled to Washington that it disapproved of Soviet missile deployments in Cuba and would not join in Soviet offensive military operations against the US or NATO; it blocked Moscow’s attempt to admit Mongolia into the Warsaw Pact and extend the military responsibilities of the alliance to the Chinese border; and it concluded an economic accord with West Germany, which the Kremlin was then portraying as the major source of instability and threat in Europe.¹¹⁰ Although publicly denying any serious differences with its junior ally and disseminating false reports that Romania was their “Trojan horse,” by 1964 Soviet officials privately acknowledged that Romania was “going its own way,” opposing important Kremlin policies within the bloc and internationally.¹¹¹

Along with Soviet political, economic and propaganda pressure, messages from Moscow raised serious concerns that military action might be in the offing and led Bucharest to request economic and military assistance from China.¹¹² Brezhnev would soon be describing Romania to the other Warsaw Pact members as “the fundamental obstruction to

¹⁰⁹ Ibid, pp. 19, 26.

¹¹⁰ Larry L. Watts, *Romanian Security Policy and the Cuban Missile Crisis*, Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars, Cold War International Project e-Dossier No. 38, February 2013a, <http://www.wilsoncenter.org/publication/romania-security-policy-and-the-cuban-missile-crisis>.

¹¹¹ See e.g. Brezhnev in *Report about the Foreign Policy of the USSR and the Struggle for the Unity of the Communist Movement, in the XXIII Plenum of the Central Committee of the CPSU, December 12-13 1966*, Russian State Archive of Contemporary History (*Rossiiskii Gosudarstvennyi Arkhiv Noveishei Istorii*: RGANI), Moscow, fond 2, opis 3, delo 45, pages 32-33. For sixteen main points of Soviet-Romanian contention and Soviet reaction as of July 1964 see Documents 3-7 in Watts (2013b), <https://www.wilsoncenter.org/publication/divided-loyalties-within-the-bloc-romanian-objection-to-soviet-informal-controls-1963>.

¹¹² *Note on the Conversation Between Gheorghe Gheorghiu-Dej, First Secretary of the RWP CC and President of the State Council of the P. R. Romania, and Liu Fang, Ambassador of the Chinese P.R. in Bucharest, Referring to Bilateral Relations and the Soviet-Chinese Ideological Conflict*, June 5, 1964, Snagov, Document 219 in Budura (2005), pp. 472-476. Beijing agreed to supply the Romanians in July. ANR, Fond C.C. al P.C.R., Secția Relații Externe, dosar 93/1963, f. 41-53. See also Elena Dragomir, *Cold War Perceptions: Romania’s Policy Change Towards The Soviet Union, 1960-1964*, Helsinki: Doctoral Dissertation University of Helsinki, 2014, pp. 169, 174, 191.

our line.”¹¹³ As the Soviet Central Committee predicted, that opposition only increased over the following decades.¹¹⁴ Despite incessant disinformation that Romania was a “Trojan horse” and its independence a façade, during the 1960s the US intelligence community was well aware that Romania had struck out on its own, and so was the international media.¹¹⁵

This dogged independence ensured Romania’s other interlocutors that it was not acting as Soviet proxy in its dealings with them. In contrast, ever since the late 1950s, all of the other Warsaw Pact leaderships accepted the subordination of their foreign and security policies to the Soviet Union.¹¹⁶ Aside from Romania, no East European member of the Soviet bloc pursued policy initiatives without first gaining Soviet approval, and none ever pursued a foreign or security policy position against Soviet wishes.¹¹⁷

Romanian policy was not only independent, it was oriented towards breathing life into a series of otherwise moribund principles that Moscow had included in the original 1955 Warsaw Pact treaty (and reiterated in the 1960 Moscow declaration) regarding full equality of its members, non-interference in domestic affairs and respect for their sovereignty and independence. In April 1964 Bucharest championed these principles as the foundation of a “new type of relations” within the socialist camp, consecrating them as national policy and the basis for all of Romania’s foreign relations, regardless of ideology or “social order”.¹¹⁸ According to the Declaration:

¹¹³ *Record of the Meeting Between Leonid Brezhnev and East European Party Leaders in the Crimea (Including Discussion on China)*, August 2, 1971, pp. 40-43, in Christian Nuenlist and Anna Locher, editors, “China and Eastern Europe from the 1960s to the 1980s: International Conference, Beijing, 24-26 March 2004,” PHP. The Soviet Central Committee was directed to be “unequivocally positive about Poland and Hungary” while treating the Romanians as “black sheep.” *The Diary of Anatoly S. Chernyaev 1973*, entry for April 16, 1973, National Security Archive, 2013, <http://nsarchive.gwu.edu/NSAEBB/NSAEBB430/>.

¹¹⁴ For similar assessments under Yuri Andropov see Documents 1-5 in Watts (2012a), <http://www.wilsoncenter.org/publication/e-dossier-no-29-the-soviet-romanian-clash-over-history-identity-and-dominion>.

¹¹⁵ For example, Romania’s reform proposal was discussed at length in successive issues of the *New York Times*, 14-18 and 22 May 1966. See also, *The Times* (London), 16 May 1966.

¹¹⁶ Albania had broken with the Pact in 1961, before it became a functioning military alliance, boycotting its subsequent meetings until it formally withdrew from the alliance in 1968. Although Czechoslovak military leaders began generating independent security initiatives with major implications for foreign policy during the Prague Spring in 1968, the Dubcek leadership refrained from doing so.

¹¹⁷ The subordination of Polish, Hungarian, Czechoslovak, East German and Bulgarian foreign and security policy to Moscow is documented in Anna Locher, “Shaping the Policies of the Alliance: The Committee of Ministers of Foreign Affairs of the Warsaw Pact, 1976-1990” May 2002, and Christian Nünlist, “Cold War Generals: The Warsaw Pact Committee of Defense Ministers, 1969-90,” May 2001, PHP. This subordination began seriously unraveling only during 1989.

¹¹⁸ The “declaration of independence,” set out within a formal plea to Beijing and Moscow to end their polemics, was officially entitled *Declaration with Regard to the Position of the Romanian Workers’ Party on the Problems of the International Communist and Workers’ Movement*. *Scântea*, 26 April 1964.

Every state has the sacred duty of making its own contribution to the easing of international tension and the settlement of interstate problems through negotiation. The principle of peaceful coexistence among countries with different social systems is the foundation of the foreign policy of socialist states. This principle implies the settlement of controversial issues through negotiation, without resort to war, on the basis of acknowledging the right of every people to decide its own fate, of observing the sovereignty and territorial integrity of states, of full equality, and of mutual noninterference in internal affairs. ...

Experience has shown that statesmen who abandon the language of threats and give proof of realism, wisdom, patience and perseverance are able to find through negotiation mutually acceptable solutions to the most complex and thorny issues of interstate relations. Negotiations with any capitalist country on this basis, in order to seek solutions to outstanding issues and improve interstate relations, in no way implies abandonment of principles; rather, it means serving the interests of peace.¹¹⁹

This was not merely one official declaration out of thousands nor yet another propagandistic contribution to the “Soviet peace policy.” It was a fundamental revision of Romanian foreign policy that had been under preparation for several years.¹²⁰ The declaration itself was briefed to all local party leaders and party committees and established as a guideline for all Romanian diplomats serving abroad.¹²¹ It was also a principal source of popular support for the regime and international prestige for Romania for the next quarter century.

Romania relied upon this “new code of international principles” to combat Moscow’s attempts to create supranational organisms, assume the role of “leading center,” and otherwise impose Soviet control over the Council for Mutual Economic Assistance and the Warsaw Pact. For example, the Declaration stated that: “There are no, and there can be no

¹¹⁹ Many archive-based studies have appeared on this topic in Romania since 1989. Among them, Mihai Croitor, *In umbra Kremlinului: Gheorghe Gheorghiu-Dej si geneza declaratiei din aprilie 1964* [In The Shadow Of The Kremlin: Gheorghe Gheorghiu-Dej And The Genesis Of The April 1964 Declaration], Cluj-Napoca: Editura Mega, 2012; Vasile Buga, editor, *O vara fierbinte in relatii romano-sovietice: Convorbirile de la Moscova din iulie 1964* [A Very Hot Summer In Romanian-Soviet Relations: The Conversations in Moscow, July 1964], Bucharest, National Institute for the Study of Totalitarianism, 2012; Florian Banu and Liviu Taranu, *Aprilie 1964 – “Primavara de la Bucharest”: Cum s-a fost adoptat “Declaratia de independent” a Romaniei?* [April 1964 – “The Bucharest Spring”: How Was The Romanian “Declaration of Independence” Adopted], Bucharest, Editura Enciclopedica, 2004; and Dan Catanus, *Intre Beijing si Moscova: Romania si conflictul Sovieto-Chinez* [Between Beijing and Moscow: Romania and the Soviet-Chinese Conflict], Bucharest, National Institute For the Study of Totalitarianism, 2004.

¹²⁰ Although aspects of this shift may have been under consideration since before Stalin’s death, the proximate causes for its enunciation and publication were Soviet attempts to exert greater control over the national economies and armies of the East European bloc members during the early 1960s and the 1962 Cuban Missile Crisis. See e.g. Watts (2013a), <http://www.wilsoncenter.org/publication/romania-security-policy-and-the-cuban-missile-crisis>.

¹²¹ On the importance of the Declaration as guideline for Romanian officials see Banu and Taranu (2004), pp. 44-277. See also Dragomir (2014), pp. 159-160.

‘parent’ parties or ‘son’ parties, no ‘superior’ or ‘subordinate’ parties; there is a great family of communist and workers’ parties equal in rights; no party has or can have a privileged position, none can impose its line or opinions upon other parties.”¹²² And Bucharest was not bashful in sharing its experiences in this confrontation with its Vietnamese and Chinese colleagues. [[Documents 6, 17, 20, 30](#)]

Hanoi found this approach quite attractive in that it faced similar sorts of pressures from both Moscow and Beijing while likewise maintaining policy independence as a value that it was unwilling to trade off. As Pham Van Dong noted:

We are trying to have the best relations possible with those two great parties. However we agree that we must do even more in this sense. We will talk further about this in a serious manner. It is perhaps the most important issue. For us it is extremely important. I would not go so far as to say it is vital, because we are the ones who decide our own fate, however, it is very important. [[Document 17](#)]

Repeatedly, Bucharest intervened with Moscow and Beijing regarding the negative impact the Sino-Soviet rift was having on the resolution of the Vietnam conflict and the interests of the Vietnamese. As Maurer explained to Kosygin in October 1966:

It should be well understood that the struggle of Vietnam is based in principle on two external pillars; they are yourselves and China. You, because you have the material possibilities of supporting them very much and you have, at the same time, the political possibilities; China – because it is there and nothing can enter into Vietnam except through China. ...

Thus they are obligated to take into account and to weigh, whenever they want to do something, how to proceed so that they do not spoil something. For example, I have two friends. My life depends up these two, but it so happens that these two do not get along. When I do something, I must do it in a way that does not anger either one or the other. [[Document 32](#)]

For Bucharest, ensuring the independence of small and medium-sized states was necessary for the healthy evolution of the international community. The Romanians believed that smaller states tended to approach international relations more wisely than larger and great powers because they paid far more attention to consensus and accommodation since they had not the wherewithal to even contemplate the forceful imposition of their policies

¹²² *Scântea*, 26 April 1964.

upon others. As Prime Minister Maurer explained to Dutch Foreign Minister (and, later, NATO's longest serving secretary general) Joseph Luns:

I will speak plainly. When you are powerful, you can permit yourself the luxury of sometimes behaving with a lack of intelligence. When you are small and weak, however, you do not have the possibility to do this. You must be intelligent, because if you are not intelligent and prudent then you will pay, and you will pay dearly. Because of this, to a very great degree, the future of humanity will be dictated and decided by the intelligence and the spirit of decisiveness that the small countries will show, because they will be the ones who find the most supple and most reasonable modalities, since they have not the force to impose them while the others can take recourse to force. [[Document 39](#)]

Bucharest was not alone in this belief. Indeed, the logic of a greater need for wisdom among vulnerable small states was unassailable, although no guarantee of its presence. As Luns replied: "You are right that we must be by the nature of things much wiser than large countries." This logic, the fruit of experience gained by a country that, like itself, was located at the borders of empires and in the path of invasions, also drew Hanoi's interest and attention.

So too did Bucharest's already extraordinarily large network of international relations created in the pursuit of this policy. Romanian eyes and ears absorbed much during the many visits and consultations that formed an essential part of its proactive and energetic foreign policy. By the mid-1960s Bucharest had made itself a valuable clearing-house, often using its knowledge and "good offices" to facilitate the improvement of relations between third parties in conflict and the establishment of relations where none had existed before. As the North Vietnamese prime minister phrased it: "You are a country well placed to have vast relations and to know better the opinions of one or another, which allows you to have ideas and suggestions, from which we can and could profit." [[Document 30](#)]

(2) Coalitional Warfare vs. People's War

Romania also found itself at odds with the rest of the bloc and on common ground with the Vietnamese regarding the strategy and tactics of "people's war." Although a Warsaw Pact member, the Romanian leadership declared to President Kennedy in 1963 that it would take no part in any Soviet-initiated offensive and then ended anything more than nominal participation in Pact exercises, steadily reducing the training and availability of its military units for coalitional operations during the 1960s. By 1966 Bucharest began building its own

defense industries suited to their people's war strategy, thus making a virtue of necessity since Moscow also stopped supplying heavier military equipment (even in exchange for payment).

The people's war strategy was anathema to the USSR for several reasons, beginning with the fact that it encouraged, indeed, required independent orientations that undermined Moscow's control of individual Warsaw Pact armies and undercut Soviet coalitional warfare strategy. Armies limited to operations within their home territory (more or less) were unavailable for regional and out-of-area deployments and operations, thus also torpedoing the power projection mission that Soviet military authorities still envisioned for the Warsaw Pact during the early 1960s.¹²³

Even when attracted by national territorial defense strategies, the other bloc members were nevertheless bound to Soviet military strategy, training, recruitment, equipment, etc.¹²⁴ In accepting Moscow's direction of their military and defense policies, and Soviet training of their senior officer corps, the other bloc members had also adopted Moscow's corollary biases and interpretational paradigms. In consequence, their senior officers sounded a lot like their Soviet counterparts, and their reports faithfully echoing the Moscow line that the Vietnamese were seriously underestimating US strength, effectiveness and staying power while overestimating their own successes, capabilities and resistance.

According to a mid-January 1966 Polish assessment, for example:

The Vietnamese leaders see their situation in a rosy light, overestimate their military successes, do not realize the readiness of the USA for war on a broad scale, underestimate the military potential of the USA. The Vietnamese comrades ... overestimate the possibility of public opinion in the USA to speak out against the war in Vietnam.¹²⁵

Military analysts in Prague criticized the "victory through people's war" thesis in almost exactly the same terms nine months later, claiming there were "discrepancies"

¹²³ See e.g. Francis Fukuyama, *Soviet Civil-Military Relations and the Power Projection Mission*, R-3504, Santa Monica, RAND, April 1987.

¹²⁴ The Polish general staff, for instance, seriously advocated such a strategy but the Polish military and party leadership never let it move from the drawing board. See e.g. 1956-11-02-Gen. Jan Drzewiecki's *Critique of the Statute of the Unified Command, and Intelligence Information Special Report: 1979 Wartime Statute of the Combined Armed Forces*, 28 November 1979, CWIHP, www.CWIHP.org, by permission of the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars.

¹²⁵ *Reception by Soviet Vice Foreign Minister V. V. Kuznetsov for the General Director of the PRP FMA, Cde. Jerzy Michalowski*, 24 January 1966, Document 16 in *CWIHP Bulletin* No. 16 (Fall 2007-Winter 2008): 387-88; Hershberg (2012), p. 58.

between Vietnamese appreciations of the military situation and reality. The alleged ‘problem,’ according to Czechoslovak assessment, was that Hanoi “overestimated” its military successes “while the military strength of the US and the possibility of the exacerbation of the situation by the US are underestimated.”¹²⁶

As great powers, Moscow and Washington were prone to fall into the trap of believing that overwhelming military force ensured victory and that its application necessarily translated into desired political consequences. Maurer described to Vietnamese authorities the approach that Soviet Defense Minister Malinovski adopted in his “briefing on the military situation in Vietnam, for information purposes” at the July 1966 Warsaw Pact meeting. Malinovski stressed in turn US military superiority, the massive amount of uncommitted military resources the United States still possessed and would commit as it escalated military operations, and the fact that “the correlation of force between the Vietnamese and Americans is favorable to the Americans,” all of which strongly suggested the inevitability of US victory. Aware of Soviet skepticism regarding their chances, Pham Van Dong pointed out that the Vietnamese struggle for national liberation was hardly chimeric, and that Malinovski was not only inaccurate but defeatist: “If he starts off from the premise that we can do nothing against the American armed forces then what remains for us to do?” [[Document 30](#)]

The Romanians concurred. Maurer, in fact, had challenged Malinovski on the “completeness” of his briefing based on Malinovski’s failure to include any perspectives or inputs from Vietnamese military experts. This type of analysis, Maurer observed, was also wide open to criticism because it failed to apprehend that the conflict in question was not one of conventional warfare:

This is a war with a special character. It is not a contest of two constituted armies in which victory is decided through the defeat of one army by the other. This is a completely different kind of war. It is not new in history because similar conflicts have existed in the past: for example, in Spain during the time of Napoleon, in Russia in 1812, and there are numerous other similar cases as well. Even if one analyzes it from the purely military perspective, things do not stand exactly as presented by Malinovski. [[Document 30](#)]

¹²⁶ “Information on the Visit of a Czechoslovak Party and Government Delegation Headed by [Prime Minister] Comrade Lenart in North Vietnam, 24-28 September 1966,” September, 1966, History and Public Policy Program Digital Archive, PAAA-MfAA, Botschaft Moskau–Politische Abteilung, Microfiche 001170, 8-9. Translated by Lorenz Lüthi. <http://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/117740>.

Maurer further underscored for his Vietnamese colleague that the issue had absolutely nothing to do with ideology, conventional military superiority or national wealth, and everything to do with the fundamental logic of people's war:

When the French decided to withdraw from Spain there were no Marxist-Leninists that advised them, but they withdrew because they could no longer resist. Undoubtedly, they had defeated the [Spanish] royal armies, but then they found themselves facing the [Spanish] people. [Document 30]

(3) Relations with China

Relations with the People's Republic of China constituted the third major issue differentiating Romania from the rest of the bloc and aligning it with Vietnam. Like the other bloc members Romania had interrupted relations with the PRC at Soviet direction in 1961, although without breaking off diplomatic relations entirely. By 1962, and especially after the Cuban Missile Crisis, Bucharest reconsidered its position and set to work repairing its relationship with Beijing.

This was partly accomplished by mid-1963, when Romania blocked the Soviet-sponsored admission of Mongolia into the Warsaw Pact that would have placed bloc member armed forces on the border with and in opposition to the People's Liberation Army of China.¹²⁷ By the end of that year Bucharest was actively seeking Beijing's assistance to block a re-imposition of Soviet control over the Council for Mutual Economic Assistance (CMEA) and its members.¹²⁸ The Romanian strategy was to create a quorum within the CMEA for implementing the principles of "new-type" relations, thereby obstructing Moscow's hegemonic tendencies.¹²⁹

As the Romanians explained it to the leadership in Beijing, China would first "resume its participation" as a CMEA observer followed by Albania's resumption of its full membership in the organization, which it never formally lost or renounced. Finally, China, North Vietnam and North Korea would apply for and receive full membership in the CMEA as well.¹³⁰ Once those conditions were fulfilled then Bucharest would work together with Beijing, Tirana, Hanoi and Pyongyang on how best "to reform this organization so that it

¹²⁷ See e.g. Documents 6 and 7 in Watts (2013a), <http://www.wilsoncenter.org/publication/romania-security-policy-and-the-cuban-missile-crisis>.

¹²⁸ Dragomir (2014), pp. 131-134, 153. See also *Maurer's Note*, March 3, 1964, Beijing, ANR, Fond C.C. al P.C.R., Secția Relații Externe, dosar 5/1964, f. 1-3.

¹²⁹ The November 1964 Romanian-Chinese discussion of this strategy is reproduced in Documents 234 and 236, Budura (2005), pp. 609-629, 637-645.

¹³⁰ Dragomir (2014), p. 131.

complies with the principles upon which we agree.”¹³¹ Accepting the validity of Romanian logic and the possibility of future membership Beijing decided that it would support Bucharest, but only outside of the CMEA.¹³²

During 1964 and 1965 Bucharest also tried to enlist China to combat Soviet control over the Warsaw Pact military alliance by restoring the full participation of China’s close ally Albania and reinstituting the practice of including Chinese, North Vietnamese and North Korean observers in Warsaw Pact meetings.¹³³ As Bodnaras told the Chinese Ambassador in November 1964, the Romanians “consider that the Warsaw Pact serves the Soviet Union by assuring its political and military domination over the other socialist countries.”¹³⁴ Ceausescu expressed Romanian intent quite clearly to Deng Xiaoping in July 1965, “basically, the armies of the other socialist countries of Europe are subordinated [to Moscow] in the organization of the Warsaw Pact and in the unified command. We want to liquidate this state of affairs.”¹³⁵ However, Beijing refused to place itself in any position in which Moscow could theoretically summon it to a meeting and then exploit its presence as proof of Soviet control and Chinese acquiescence to Kremlin policies.¹³⁶ While repeatedly expressing their admiration and moral support for the Romanian battle along interior lines, the Chinese would continue to combat Soviet hegemonic tendencies from outside the bloc.¹³⁷

Moscow misread the purpose of these efforts and, apparently, their origins. Romania, the Soviet leadership believed and feared, was seeking to leave the Soviet bloc altogether

¹³¹ Ibid, p. 153.

¹³² In January 1964 Chinese leaders stated that their “Central Committee is studying this issue” and acknowledged that: “If together with Korea and Vietnam we will accede to the CMEA, then you will no longer be alone. We will support you and other countries. ... Accession of China, Korea and Vietnam to the CMEA will crush [Moscow’s] control over the CMEA. *Notes On 21 January 1964 Audience Granted by Gheorghiu-Dej to Xu Jianguo*; and *24 January 1964 Audience Granted by Liu Shaoqi to Dumitru Gheorghiu*, ANR, fond C.C. al P.C.R., Secția Relații Externe, dosar 93/1963, f. 23-32 and dosar 42/1964, f. 12-31.

¹³³ This extraordinary tale is told in a series of Sino-Romanian discussions in November 1964-January 1965. See Documents 234, 236, 240-242, 244 in Budura (2005), pp. 609-629, 637-645, 651-669, 671-679.

¹³⁴ Document 236 in Budura (2005), pp. 637-645; ANR, fond C.C. al P.C.R., Secția Relații Externe, dosar 5/1964, f. 159-169.

¹³⁵ Document 267 in Budura (2005), pp. 731-740; ANR, fond C.C. al P.C.R., Secția Cancelarie, dosar 105/1965, f. 2-15.

¹³⁶ See e.g. the two audiences of Emil Bodnaras with Chinese Ambassador Liu Fang on January 1 and 9, 1965, Documents 240 and 241 in Budura (2005), pp. 651-662.

¹³⁷ In January 1965 Beijing declared its “firm support” for Bucharest’s “struggle against the transformation of the Warsaw Pact organization by the Soviet Union into an instrument of control over the other member countries” and its admiration for their efforts “within the framework of the Warsaw Pact, attenuating the Soviet Union’s great power chauvinist errors.” *Note Regarding the Audience of Liu Fang, the Ambassador of the Chinese P. R. in Bucharest, with Emil Bodnaras*, January 9, 1965, Document 241 in Budura (2005), pp. 659-662; ANR, fond C.C. al P.C.R., Secția Relații Externe, dosar 4/1965, f. 16-19. Six months earlier Zhou Enlai declared that: “Our Party admires your resistance against the pressures exerted by the USSR because you are in a worse situation than us since you are surrounded by revisionist countries. The pressures exerted by the USSR are especially great.” *Note Regarding the 17 July 1964 Audience Granted by Zhou Enlai to Dumitru Gheorghiu*, ANR, fond C.C. al P.C.R., Secția Relații Externe, dosar 93/1963, f. 41-53.

rather than ‘merely’ creating new rules and relationships within it. Moscow further believed that China was behind the “anti-Soviet” actions within the CMEA and the Warsaw Pact in an attempt to split the socialist community in two and create a second “leading center” headed by Beijing. In response, the Kremlin mounted its “INTERKIT” campaign against China (and Romania as Beijing’s ally within the bloc).¹³⁸ Among the first collection priorities sent out to its embassies and allies, Moscow was particularly interested in the “kind of influence” Beijing exercised in Romania and the motivations (and Moscow’s worst-case scenario) for Sino-Romanian rapprochement:

What positions does the Romanian Communist Party take in appraising policies of the Chinese Communist Party leadership? Is there a perspective of creating a new Communist international, which would coordinate the policy and practice of the international communist movement?¹³⁹

By the beginning of 1966 the Sino-Romanian relationship was so exceptional that other states seeking to improve relations with or their understanding of Asia’s sleeping giant began appealing to Bucharest for assistance. This was obviously the case with Shelepin’s March request for Romanian intercession with Beijing. [Document 14] Washington also probed the Romanians for their insights into Chinese thinking the previous October. As Leslie Glass, Great Britain’s Ambassador to Romania and a noted China and Asian specialist himself, explained in a January 1966 meeting with Ceausescu:

Romania has created a unique platform of having good relations with China, maintaining at the same time close ties with the other socialist countries and developing its relations with western states. This balanced and elastic policy enjoys high appreciation in England and in other parts of the world. Perhaps it is due to this singular situation that Romania, which has incomparably greater possibilities of contact with China than any other country in the world, could – in case it considered it

¹³⁸ See Larry L. Watts, *A Romanian INTERKIT? Soviet Active Measures and the Warsaw Pact Maverick 1965-1989*, CWIHP Working Paper #65, December 2012b, Woodrow Wilson International Center, http://www.wilsoncenter.org/sites/default/files/CWIHP_Working_Paper_65_Watts_Romanian_Interkit_0.pdf. See also James G. Hershberg, David Wolff, Péter Vámos, and Sergey Radchenko, *The Interkit Story: A Window into the Final Decades of the Sino-Soviet Relationship*, CWIHP Working Paper #63, February 2011.

¹³⁹ Moldavian Communist Party CC, *Information on the results of familiarization of communists of the Moldavian republic with the letter of the CPSU CC of 30 December 1965*, February 12, 1966, in Archive of Social-Political Organizations of the Republic of Moldova (AOSPRM), Chişinău, fond 51, inventory 27, box 11, pp. 43-47. Eleven months later Moscow requested intelligence on Bucharest’s economic ties with Beijing and on the RCP’s support for “the schismatic policy of the CCP leadership.” *Questions: Communist tasks regarding familiarization with the information materials of the CPSU CC*, November 16, 1966, in AOSPRM, fond 51, inventory 27, box 11, pp. 110-113.

useful and at the opportune moment – help the West in understanding more precisely the policy of China, the manner of thinking of the Chinese leaders.¹⁴⁰ [Document 11]

The Romanians also earned leverage in Beijing by operating as proxy foreign ministry when the People's Republic of China shut down its embassies and withdrew its diplomats during the Cultural Revolution. Bucharest's relentless effort to have Beijing accepted into the United Nations was perhaps the most evident aspect of this role. During the first half of 1965 Bucharest also helped Beijing to establish its first commercial offices and then diplomatic relations with Uruguay, Italy, Austria and, later, several northern European states (including, eventually, West Germany).¹⁴¹ In addition, Beijing entrusted the Romanians with the care of its diplomatic properties and interests in Ghana when relations with that country broke down at the beginning of 1966, and in Jakarta as well, when Sino-Indonesian relations were interrupted in 1967.¹⁴²

Within a few months of Maurer's admonition to departing US Ambassador Crawford that the United States should "not ignore" China, Washington had not only ameliorated its policies towards Beijing, it had modified them in a subtle but profound manner.¹⁴³ In just over half a year President Johnson would appeal to Romanian "good offices" for assistance in the intermediation of US-Chinese relations.¹⁴⁴ It is noteworthy that several months before Johnson made this appeal, in March 1967, the leadership in Bucharest had discussions of

¹⁴⁰ Ambassador Glass emphasized his awareness "that Romania does not intend to engage in any activity of mediation" in his appeal for Romanian insight into Chinese thinking and intention "that the western countries had no practical possibility of gaining themselves."

¹⁴¹ See Documents 245, 247 and 256 in Budura (2005), pp. 683, 685, 717. In the case of Austria, for example, Bucharest helped the Chinese establish commercial relations "in order to prepare the expansion of relations with a view to establishing diplomatic relations." Document 264 in Budura (2005), p. 726.

¹⁴² See Documents 285, 288, 293 and 305 in Budura (2005).

¹⁴³ Răceanu (2005), p. 196. The State Department eased travel restrictions to the PRC (a move proposed since 1963) in December 1965. In March 1966, Vice President Hubert Humphrey publicly advocated a new policy towards Beijing of "containment without isolation," a term coined by China expert A. Doak Barnett at the Senate Foreign Relations Committee hearings on US China policy convened that same month. See CIA *Intelligence Report: Soviet Thinking About the Danger of a Sino-US Rapprochement*, Reference Title: ESAU LI, February 1971, p. 3, <http://www.foia.cia.gov/document/intelligence-study-soviet-thinking-about-danger-sino-us-rapprochement-february-1971>; *Memorandum From James C. Thomson, Jr., of the National Security Council Staff to the President's Special Assistant (Moyers)*, Washington, March 15, 1966, Document 136 in *FRUS, 1964-1968, Volume XXX, China*.

¹⁴⁴ *Memorandum of Conversation*, Washington, June 26, 1967, Document 157 in *Foreign Relations Of The United States 1964-1968, Volume XVII Eastern Europe*. While the degree of Bucharest's influence on US policy towards China remains a topic of debate, a former Chinese Ambassador noted that Romania was "enthusiastic" and "sincere" in its support of Sino-American rapprochement "as early as possible" during the 1960s. Chen Denlai in Xiaoyuan Liu and Vojtech Mastny, editors, *China and Eastern Europe, 1960-1980s*, Proceedings of the International Symposium: Reviewing the History of Chinese-East European Relations from the 1960s to the 1980s, Beijing, 24-26 March 2004, pp. 132-133, in "Global Cold War," PHP.

even greater portent on the topic with former Vice-President Richard M. Nixon, during the latter's first visit to Romania.¹⁴⁵

The North Vietnamese very much appreciated the friendly Romanian-Chinese relationship that Bucharest managed to maintain regardless of obvious Soviet bloc antagonism towards Beijing and despite the debilitating impact of the Cultural Revolution. Hanoi acknowledged that both their countries were anomalous within the socialist community in their ability to maintain good relations with both of the socialist giants. As Pham Van Dong stressed during the May 1966 talks:

One thing that ties both sides is that we promote a policy of equality and of the independence of our party towards other parties, and of our state towards other states. It is the only just policy. We persevere in this direction and we need to have an exchange of experience in this regard. Due to this policy, we have good relations with the Chinese comrades and with the Soviet comrades, something that, at this moment, is exceptional. [[Document 17](#)]

Rebuilding a Path to Negotiations

The Soviets had run into a brick wall in February 1965 when they inadvertently compromised the very idea of negotiations by arguing for them to Hanoi based on the “inevitable” victory of superior American military forces.¹⁴⁶ Sharp reactions from Hanoi and Beijing compelled Moscow to abandon a direct mediation role, even though it continued its efforts to ensure that any peace negotiations would serve basic Soviet interests and not benefit China or the US more than the USSR. Paradoxically, the US administration became convinced that Moscow was the best (and even only) hope for advancing peace negotiations almost exactly when the Kremlin had become one of the least relevant of the Soviet bloc efforts. Sino-Soviet antagonisms had neutralized any active Soviet role in the search for a peaceful solution to the war almost entirely. While Moscow sought to condemn and exclude China from the socialist camp, Beijing denounced the Soviets as “traitors” acting in

¹⁴⁵ *Transcript of Discussions on the Occasion of the Reception by Comrade Nicolae Ceausescu of Richard Nixon, Former Vice-President of the USA*, March 22, 1967, ANR, Fond C.C. al P.C.R., Secția Relații Externe, dosar 15/1967, f. 1-24.

¹⁴⁶ Chinese leaders addressed this at some length during their attendance at Gheorghiu Dej's funeral in March 1965 and for many months thereafter. See e.g. *Stenographic Transcript of Ceaușescu-Deng Conversation*, July 26, 1965, at PHP, National Collections, <http://www.php.isn.ethz.ch/collections/colltopic.cfm?lng=en&id=16325&navinfo=15342>.

complicity with the United States and selling out not only the Vietnamese but the socialist camp and Marxism-Leninism generally. [[Documents 1, 26](#)]

Polish, Hungarian and Czechoslovak efforts all suffered (although not necessarily fatally so) from this initial starting condition because their leaderships followed the Soviet playbook in interpreting the war. Thus, like the Kremlin, they exaggerated the importance of conventional military superiority and systematically underestimated the people's war strategy and the will of the Vietnamese people that underlay it. Warsaw, Budapest and Prague were likewise hobbled by Moscow's insistence that peace negotiations required Chinese disadvantage and the coercion of the Vietnamese.

The Chinese delegation to the funeral of Gheorghe Gheorghiu-Dej in March 1965 passionately condemned Soviet efforts in February to coerce Hanoi to accept the US proposal of "unconditional negotiations." According to the analysis of Deng Xiaoping, accepting the US proposal would consecrate the existence of a US client state in south and the continued division of Vietnam, representing a defeat for Hanoi and socialism worldwide as well as a continuing threat to China. [[Document 1](#)]

While the discussions with the Vietnamese delegation at Dej's funeral have yet to surface, at the end of May 1965 the Vietnamese described to Bucharest what they deemed to be the various "unhelpful" approaches adopted by fraternal socialist allies "who do not understand us very well."¹⁴⁷ Hanoi considered that some socialist countries were going 'off the reservation' because of the Moscow line: "For example, the USSR views as more or less acceptable the proposal presented by Johnson." [[Document 3](#)]

Two months later, the Chinese explained to Romanian leaders that Moscow was attempting to convene a conference on Vietnam, suddenly and without any detailed preparation, in order to present a series of *fait accompli* both in the coordination of assistance (and thus leverage over Hanoi) and in forcing a "common decision" of the European and Asian socialist countries. [[Document 4](#)] These suspicions spoke directly to Romanian experience and concerns within the CMEA and the Warsaw Pact, where, since at least 1963, Moscow met separately with the other Soviet bloc members to reach understandings that were then presented as *fait accompli* to the Romanians, prompting complaint after complaint from Bucharest against the practice.

¹⁴⁷ This evaluation, delivered by the Vietnamese ambassador directly to Romania's new party chief, began with a similar consideration of "unhelpful" initiatives from the neutral non-aligned states at their 1965 conference in Belgrade, with especially harsh criticism reserved for Tito and his initiative.

When probed by Ceausescu as to the perspective for peace negotiations, Deng unequivocally rejected the possibility, claiming that they would only serve as pretext for massive anti-Vietnamese atrocities. Maurer's attempt to keep at least the possibility alive, by rephrasing the question as "if in the final analysis, seeing that there is no other exit, the Americans become smarter and show themselves willing to withdraw the troops," caused Deng to burst into laughter. Of course, he admitted, as if the possibility had not a snowball's chance in hell, "then negotiations must be held." [Document 4]

Politburo member Le Duc Tho reinforced this point while leading the Vietnamese delegation to RCP's 9th Plenum in July 1965. Stressing Hanoi's (rather accurate) assessment that US offers of immediate negotiations were in US interest because they currently held the advantage, he stated that things would change only when the shoe was on the other foot. Until then, he said, "We are opposed to negotiations." [Document 5]

By the summer of 1965 Bucharest understood that Moscow had inadvertently poisoned the well of peace negotiations by discounting Hanoi's strategy of people's war, exaggerating the impact of great resource disparity, underestimating the endurance and willpower of the Vietnamese, and ignoring centuries of Vietnamese experience. This assessment was doubtlessly reinforced by Romania's own recent adoption of a people's war strategy (to deter a Soviet military threat primarily) as a further guarantee of its own independence. Like Hanoi and especially Beijing, Bucharest perceived the USSR as pressing the DRV to engage in negotiations and accept a peace that suited Soviet rather than Vietnamese interests, while denying the very reason for the Vietnamese struggle in the first place – the independence and unification of their country.¹⁴⁸ The Romanians understood that so long as the topic of negotiations was broached in this manner there was virtually no way in which Hanoi could perceive negotiations and their advocacy in any other manner than as "capitulation."

Bucharest came away from these exchanges with a series of "dos and don'ts" for its own efforts to move the Democratic Republic of Vietnam towards negotiations. They included:

¹⁴⁸ This was a touchy subject for the new leadership in Bucharest, which had just begun to lock horns with Moscow over its forced assimilation of ethnic Romanians dwelling in the territories that the USSR had forcibly occupied and annexed from Romania in World War II (Bessarabia and north Bucovina, now part of the Moldavian Soviet Socialist Republic and the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic). Watts (2012b) http://www.wilsoncenter.org/sites/default/files/CWIHP_Working_Paper_65_Watts_Romanian_Interkit_0.pdf and Watts (2012a), <http://www.wilsoncenter.org/publication/e-dossier-no-29-the-soviet-romanian-clash-over-history-identity-and-dominion>.

- 1) *Do not* pressure Hanoi to accept negotiations either directly or indirectly, by questioning Vietnam's ability to resist American military might or suggesting Hanoi compromise its fundamental interests to engage in negotiation.
- 2) *Do* advocate that Hanoi approach negotiations based on Vietnamese interests as defined by Hanoi and show how they would confer advantage in their struggle.
- 3) *Do not* allow the Soviets to create any structure, organization, conference or "common decision" that would enable Moscow to compel Hanoi into negotiations irrespective of its interests or preferred timing.
- 4) *Do* press for an all-socialist expression of solidarity and common orientation towards Vietnam as a means of (a) persuading the US and other audiences of the futility of depending on divisiveness within the bloc to undermine support for Vietnam; (b) discouraging 'off the reservation' behavior by individual socialist countries and neutral states; and (c) promoting unity (and diluting hegemonic tendencies) within the extensively riven socialist community.
- 5) *Do* insist that all initiatives regarding the war generated within the socialist camp be first checked with and approved by Hanoi, thus avoiding the exacerbation of intra-bloc and intra-community suspicions.

Hanoi's Reconsideration of Strategy

Ascertaining the significance of parallel and overlapping peace initiatives is complicated when two or more channels simultaneously intensify their activity, as happened during the autumn of 1966. Between September and November delegations from Hungary, Czechoslovakia, the Soviet Union, Romania, and Poland visited Hanoi. Together with the Bulgarians, Cubans and Mongolians, all of the above discussed the problem of Vietnam at the 16-22 October, 1966 summit in Moscow. All then sent delegations, as did the Vietnamese, to the 9th Bulgarian Communist Party Congress in Sofia (14-19 November) and to the 9th Congress of the Hungarian Socialist Workers Party in Budapest (28 November- 3 December).¹⁴⁹ In short, simple proximity and chronology placed most of the Soviet Bloc members in a position to have interacted with and possibly influenced the Democratic Republic of Vietnam in favor of refocusing its efforts on the political-diplomatic struggle during October-November 1966.

¹⁴⁹ The 5th Congress of the Albanian Workers Party (November 1-8, 1966) also took place during the same time frame. Although a delegation of the Vietnamese Workers Party participated, Romania was the only Soviet bloc member that sent a delegation.

There was a significant exchange between Warsaw and Hanoi at the start of *MARIGOLD* in June 1966, after which Warsaw inspired the preparation of a US initiative via the Italians. On the other hand, the efforts of Polish diplomat Janusz Lewandowski to meet with DRV authorities while he was in Hanoi during August-September 1966 proved unsuccessful.¹⁵⁰ There is as yet no evidence of senior-level Polish-Vietnamese contacts from June until 19-20 November, 1966, when Lewandowski and his foreign minister Adam Rapacki transmitted *MARIGOLD*'s ten-point proposal to Vietnamese authorities in Sofia and Hanoi.¹⁵¹

Thus, although the Polish-Italian-American discussions were underway during June-October, the Vietnamese took no part in them and were apparently unaware of them until the second half of November 1966. As such, *MARIGOLD* is unlikely to have provided the spark that set off the debates within the Politburo of the Vietnamese Workers Party that began in October 1966, over whether or not to intensify political-diplomatic efforts and start upon the path towards negotiations.

Polish influence at the start of Hanoi's strategic reconsideration in October was at best indirect. To the degree that it existed, it probably did so as a result of Warsaw's general stance encouraging negotiations rather than any more specific or proximate cause. There were simply no corresponding Polish-Vietnamese discussions or contacts during September-October 1966 to account for the initiation of the Vietnamese debate.

In contrast, the Romanian leadership did discuss the need to intensify political-diplomatic efforts and accept negotiations with DRV Deputy Prime Minister Le Thanh Nghi in mid-September. Informed by Nghi on 21 September, 1966 of a VWP Central Committee decision to intensify political and diplomatic efforts along with the military struggle, Ceausescu replied:

It is right to underscore the decision of the Central Committee of the party in connection with combining the military fight with the political and diplomatic struggle. All paths and all possibilities of struggle must be used. ...

Certainly, an intense political and diplomatic activity could win still more support for this struggle and isolate the American imperialists. Likewise, what is expressed in the decision, that the conditions must be created in order to make talks possible, is a correct position. Talks must be started when the necessary conditions are created, and those conditions can be obtained both through armed struggle and the defeat and repulsion of aggression and through political and diplomatic activity. ...

¹⁵⁰ Thies (1980), pp. 139-140.

¹⁵¹ Hershberg (2012), p. 216-217; Henry Brandon, *Anatomy of Error*, Boston, Gamit, 1969, pp. 74-75.

In this manner we can hasten in a real way the possibility of obtaining victory against the American aggressors. We believe more can be done both regarding the material assistance that we can give and in regard to the political and diplomatic activity. [[Document 28](#)]

Bucharest then sent their senior-level delegation, led by Prime Minister Maurer and C. C. Foreign Relations Secretary Niculescu-Mizil, to Hanoi in 3-4 October, 1966 specifically to discuss not only the “why” of negotiations but the “why now.” Judging from the Vietnamese response, it would appear that this was the prompt that started Hanoi’s internal policy debate over negotiations. After the first day of discussions with Maurer and Niculescu-Mizil, Prime Minister Pham Van Dong announced that the VWP Politburo had met specifically to consider the Romanian proposals and arguments in favor of accepting negotiations:

We were able to present a detailed report of our discussions to our Political Bureau. ... Our comrades consider that your preoccupations are also our preoccupations, your concerns are also ours, and our relations are inspired by common ideology, common objectives, and our solidarity in the struggle. ...

We agree with you on the necessity of conducting a political fight on the international plane and of conducting an intense fight in the diplomatic domain. For our part, we will study with great seriousness and in detail all of these problems, because they are of primary interest to us. Certainly we have in view the object and the result of your reflections, as you have expressed them. On these problems we are in agreement. Regarding the form, the modalities of action, we will see, comrades. [[Document 31](#)]

Dong underscored that his party’s “Political Bureau considers your visit useful,” found all of the Romanian arguments convincing except for the timing, which was still considered as “not yet ripe,” and discovered “new elements upon which we will reflect.” The timing issue was largely a function of the fact that Hanoi knew Washington was about to escalate further, and publicly accepting negotiations under those conditions would be interpreted as capitulation by the United States.

There is no doubt that this problem must be examined by us in the near future and we should make declarations, we should undertake actions on the international plane. However, at the present moment, when a new escalation of the war is underway, the conditions are not the best, and a fundamental element for us is that the Americans respect the Democratic Republic of Vietnam. ...

We agree with all of this and we will study the conditions, the means that could have the greatest chances of success. For the time being, however, we think the conditions are not yet ripe for certain negotiations. [[Document 31](#)]

After three rounds of back-and-forth over the issue of negotiations, Pham Van Dong concluded by reiterating his Politburo's agreement with the approach advocated by Romania and its commitment to discussing and debating the best way of implementing it in the immediate future:

Comrades, we think our talks have yielded results. We understand you well and, I would like to say, in a rather profound manner. I do not dare say more, but we believe that we understand you and agree with you, with your way of viewing things, with the theses you have supported.

We are glad of this agreement between us, because it is not an easy thing to achieve. We have spoken here of very important matters, which for us are fundamental and which experience, which life has shown us to be so.

I add that for our part we will profit from everything that was said here. We will think upon these matters and it is very much indicated, even indispensable, that in parallel with military action we develop political and diplomatic action. However, we must ponder long on this issue. We should examine all of the conditions and appreciate both the advantages and disadvantages. We should neglect nothing and, on this basis, we should take concrete decisions and initiatives. We should take the offensive. [[Document 31](#)]

A month later the VWP Politburo adopted its resolution "On Intensifying the Military Struggle and the Political Struggle in South Vietnam (October and November 1966)."¹⁵²

The November resolution on intensifying the political-diplomatic struggle is a prime example of the difficulty in determining causality when multiple channels seeking the same general end were operating in parallel and simultaneously. The *Pentagon Papers* originally misidentified the *SUNFLOWER* channel (US-UK-USSR) as the inspiration for the first Trinh signal because an inquiry sent through that channel to Hanoi via the DRV Embassy in Moscow arrived on 20 January, 1967, only several days before the January 23 Plenum resolution and a week before Trinh's public signal of the same policy shift. In addition, Trinh referred to the new policy line in his 28 January, 1967 interview as a "response" to the US

¹⁵² "Politiburo Resolution on Intensifying the Military Struggle and the Political Struggle in South Vietnam (October and November 1966)," No. 154-NQ/TW, Hanoi, 27 January 1967, in Pham Thi Vinh, ed., *Van Kien Dang, Toan Tap*, Tap 28, 1967 [Collected Party Documents, Vol. 28, 1967], chief ed. Tran Tinh (Hanoi: Nha Xuat Ban Chinh Tri Quoc Gia, 2003), 141-170 (quotation on 145), translated by Merle Pribbenow as cited in Herschberg (2005), pp. 236-245.

request, which could be interpreted either as the most recent request through *SUNFLOWER* or the longer-standing US request for “some signal” as to what Hanoi would do if the US ceased bombing North Vietnam.

James Hershberg has shown conclusively that *SUNFLOWER* did not generate the Trinh signal and that fierce debate over diplomatic action and negotiations had already been going on within the VWP Politburo since October 1966.¹⁵³ Hershberg reasonably postulated that the internal debate may have been at least partly provoked by the Polish-Italian-US *MARIGOLD* channel, which was beginning to gain “traction” around that time.¹⁵⁴ His postulate that Polish interaction with Hanoi was responsible for the Politburo resolution of the Vietnamese Workers Party in November 1966 rests on similarly reasonable grounds. The Poles actively encouraged negotiations and were, during that same period, in contact with senior Vietnamese leaders and on the brink of arranging potentially the most important US-Vietnamese contact up to that point.

Unfortunately, the available versions of the November 1966 Vietnamese Politburo resolution as of this writing fail to specify the day of its issue. Polish Foreign Minister Rapacki shared the same points with Brezhnev and Nguyen Trinh at the Bulgarian party congress on 18 and 19 November that Lewandowski would present to Hanoi on 20 November. And, given the probability that one or more senior-level Polish authorities was reporting even more directly to Moscow, that information could have reached the North Vietnamese leadership through a Soviet channel several days earlier. Ambassadors Lodge, D’Orlandi and Lewandowski had crafted the final message, from which Lewandowski then formulated the ten points he would present to Hanoi, on 15 November, 1966. If the November Politburo resolution was taken at that time or afterward then *MARIGOLD* could easily have influenced it.

However, that still would not account for the VWP decision, conveyed on 8 November, 1966 to Chinese authorities by party leader Le Duan, that Hanoi had decided in favor of accepting negotiations.¹⁵⁵ As Hershberg observes, this suggests “Hanoi had decided to ‘accede to’ peace discussions with Washington even before learning of the ‘ten points’ presented by Lewandowski.”¹⁵⁶ As noted, prior to 18 November the Polish participants in

¹⁵³ Hershberg (2012), p. 236-237.

¹⁵⁴ Ibid, p. 239.

¹⁵⁵ The Polish ambassador in Hanoi first reported this meeting on November 13 and it has been confirmed by Chinese sources. Hershberg (2012), p. 219-220.

¹⁵⁶ Hershberg, *Who Murdered “Marigold”* (2000), p. 22, footnote 73.

MARIGOLD had been out of contact with senior leaders in Hanoi for more than four months, and those contacts were resumed only a week (or more) after Le Duan's visit to Beijing.

A somewhat different picture emerges when Romanian actions and contacts are introduced into the analytical mix. Bucharest obviously shared with Warsaw the same desire to facilitate the most rapid and least violent end to the Vietnam conflict possible. The question arises as to whether either one had better opportunity to influence Hanoi's behavior along these lines in the run-up to the VWP's November resolution.

In January and September 1966 Romanian leaders had discussed the need for intensifying political-diplomatic action with Deputy Prime Minister Nghi. [[Documents 7, 28](#)] In October, one month before Le Duan's trip to Beijing, they did so with Pham Van Dong, Foreign Minister Trinh and CC Secretary for Foreign Relations Xuan Thuy, among others. [[Documents 30, 37](#)] A senior Romanian delegation had just spent a week with the Vietnamese foreign minister, during 1-8 November, 1966, at the sparsely attended 5th Congress of the Albanian Workers Party in Tirana.¹⁵⁷ If there was any proximate East European influence on the timing of Le Duan's 8 November announcement to the Chinese leadership, it was most likely Romanian.

The Romanian delegation also met with Trinh at the Bulgarian Party Congress (15-19 November), by which time the Vietnamese foreign minister had accepted their invitation to visit Bucharest immediately afterward. While both the Romanians and Poles were in contact with Trinh in Sofia, the Romanians were arguing for a shift in Hanoi's strategy whereas the Poles were setting up a specific direct US-Vietnamese contact. It is evident that Lewandowski believed the *MARIGOLD* team was providing a "package deal" that would lead fairly directly "to peace talks, if not peace itself."¹⁵⁸ But it is far from clear that Hanoi viewed it as such.

On the contrary, Pham Van Dong approached the entire affair in a very cautious "tit-for-tat" manner, suggesting that he viewed the initiative as one step – even if a potentially very important one – rather than the "package deal."¹⁵⁹ To this extent, Vietnamese

¹⁵⁷ Aside from Romanians and North Vietnamese, the North Koreans and the Chinese were the only ruling party delegations attending the Albanian congress. The Romanian-Vietnamese discussions in Tirana have not yet surfaced in the Romanian archives.

¹⁵⁸ See e.g. Hershberg (2012), p. 185-186, 212.

¹⁵⁹ Even as Pham Van Dong expressed Hanoi's willingness to allow contacts with no conditions he also underscored its skepticism regarding American sincerity (and the need to stop the bombing): "Independent of everything, the USA should cease the bombing. It is not a necessary condition before a meeting in Warsaw. It is not known if the USA will realize a meeting. It is not known if they will confirm Lodge's expressions or if they will come out with something else. It is a plain matter that if they ceased the bombings, it would constitute a step forward." Hershberg (2012), p. 232.

willingness to meet with the enemy fell within what Pham Van Dong and Nguyen Trinh had several times described to the Romanians as their “very elastic attitude in policy,” meaning that they would meet with intermediaries and even US officials when invited as a matter of policy, to put forth their position and listen to that of their interlocutor. First Deputy Prime Minister Nghi described this “elastic policy” in September as “manifested in our not rejecting conversations and interviews” with Chester Ronning from Canada or with Jean Sainteny from France, “and we have also had other conversations.” [\[Document 28\]](#)

Pham Van Dong underscored the same at the beginning of October 1966, while giving the Romanian delegation a synopsis of Hanoi’s various contacts with the Americans and “their intermediaries”:

Up until the present, we have always considered these useful for us and we do not refuse contacts, and therefore we ask our representatives in different capitals of the world to receive good faith contacts, every chance they get. In this manner, various contacts were established in Paris, Rangoon, Algiers, and to a certain extent in Cairo, and in Moscow. Whether one talks of US ambassadors or other intermediaries, we have never closed our door. [\[Document 31\]](#)

Hypothetically, Hanoi may have intended to take subsequent steps within the *MARIGOLD* “package deal” once first steps had proven fruitful. The fact that the DRV sent a representative to Warsaw specifically for the *MARIGOLD* contact indicates both willingness and intent. Unfortunately, however, North Vietnamese skepticism proved to be well founded. Barely a fortnight had passed before *MARIGOLD* came crashing down owing to an admixture of delays, miscommunications and incongruous US military operations, which, as Hershberg and others suggest, appear at some level to have been willful on the part of the Johnson administration.¹⁶⁰

On Monday morning, 21 November, after the Bulgarian Party Congress, Trinh made the short flight to Bucharest. Immediately upon arrival he was ushered into a meeting with party leader Ceausescu, Prime Minister Maurer, First Deputy Prime Minister Bodnaras and CC Secretary Niculescu-Mizil.¹⁶¹ The Romanian leaders again presented their arguments as to why it was advisable for Hanoi to intensify political-diplomatic activities and why it was especially advisable to do so at this point in time rather than later. Given the four-hour time

¹⁶⁰ As Chester Cooper noted, “any US proposal that appeared to offer genuine rather than cosmetic concessions or compromises was anathema” to the ‘hawks’ in the Johnson administration. Cooper (2005), p. 245. See also Logevall (2001).

¹⁶¹ Vietnamese ambassador to Bucharest, Hoang Tu, also participated.

difference, the Romanian-Vietnamese conversation in Bucharest was taking place at roughly the same time that Lewandowski received confirmation that the DRV leadership had received his ten points back in Hanoi.¹⁶² [[Document 38](#)]

Trinh was able, through either his embassy in Bucharest or using Romanian facilities, to report on his 21 November talks to Hanoi that same evening. Thus, the “stormy debate” that Lewandowski believed was occurring within the VWP Politburo during 21-24 November could have been sparked by Bucharest almost as easily as by Warsaw. Hanoi was certainly informed of Trinh’s change of itinerary and his trip to Romania before 21 November. It is reasonable to presume that the Vietnamese Politburo discussed both the Polish and the Romanian initiatives.¹⁶³

In the absence of evidence to the contrary, any hypothesis that the Vietnamese Politburo ignored concurrent and essentially confirming Romanian input during its 21-24 November deliberations is simply untenable. The record of Ceausescu’s dinner conversation with Trinh, or of other discussions Trinh may have had during the next two days that he spent in Romania, may clarify the situation if and when they surface.

What does seem clear already is that Moscow and the *SUNFLOWER* channel were superfluous to the debate within the Politburo back in Hanoi. Trinh left Bucharest for Moscow on Wednesday, November 23.¹⁶⁴ To Moscow’s great annoyance he did not bother to brief his Soviet counterpart, nor did Le Duc Tho when he joined Trinh in Moscow on 25 November (although the Polish Embassy did brief Gromyko on Lewandowski’s meeting a day later).¹⁶⁵

Trinh apparently shared nothing of his Romanian conversations with Kremlin leaders. As Hershberg concluded, at this point in time “Warsaw, not Moscow, was in closer touch with the DRV leadership” and “calling the diplomatic shots.”¹⁶⁶ The only amendment necessary is that both Poland *and* Romania were “in closer touch with the DRV leadership” than Moscow and more effective in influencing Hanoi’s diplomacy, although in somewhat different ways.

From the perspective of functioning contacts and physical presence, Romania and Poland were equally well positioned to have influenced the timing and content of a

¹⁶² Lewandowski submitted to them to his ICC contact the day before. Hershberg (2012), p. 221, 224.

¹⁶³ During that period Lewandowski was left cooling his heels for five days. He finally met with Pham Van Dong for the first time in more than four months on November 25, 1966. Hershberg (2012), p. 229-230.

¹⁶⁴ Bucharest embtel 21555 (Davis), 23 Nov 1966, POL 7 VIET N 1/1/66, box 2923, CFPF, 1964-66 as cited in Hershberg (2012), p. 231.

¹⁶⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶⁶ Ibid.

Vietnamese Politburo decision taken during mid-late November 1966. However, a third possibility must also be considered. Le Duan would not have travelled to Beijing on 8 November, 1966 to announce Hanoi's decision to "accede to peace talks" without having that decision in hand. Under almost no circumstances would the leader of the Vietnamese Workers Party have gone to Beijing for permission. Clearly, Hanoi was announcing a decision already taken.

Unless and until Vietnamese archives clarify the timing of the November Resolution on intensifying the political-diplomatic struggle, it cannot be assumed that Hanoi did not generate it earlier, on or before 8 November, 1966. Regardless of the fact that both Poland and Romanian were well-positioned to have influenced the timing and content of a resolution in favor of diplomatic actions and negotiations that might have been adopted sometime during 21-25 November, it is at least equally likely that Hanoi adopted such a resolution some two weeks earlier, without a direct causal linkage to either Warsaw or Bucharest (despite Romanian access to Trinh during 1-8 November). Hanoi's decision presented to Beijing by Le Duan on 8 November and the November VWP Politburo resolution may be one and the same.¹⁶⁷

The DRV, like any sovereign state, considered it vital that its decisions be seen and accepted as independently inspired. It was critical, above all, that the United States not be perceived as compelling Vietnamese decisions and behavior, followed at some distance by China and the Soviet Union. The same thing, however, applied to every other state as well. Regardless of the intimacy of the relationship and the value of advice from any particular source, the DRV leadership had a pronounced interest in putting distance between the origin of foreign recommendations and subsequent Vietnamese actions. They simply could not afford to have anyone believe that authority and determining influence on such important issues resided anywhere but Hanoi.

Assessing Influence on Hanoi's Thinking

Presuming that Warsaw and Bucharest did influence Hanoi's thinking and timing, their relative impact might be assessed (to some degree) by comparing their arguments with the formulations ultimately chosen by the VWP Politburo in its November 1966 resolution

¹⁶⁷ Some additional light may also be shed on this topic from the Romanian side, if and when the record of Romanian-Vietnamese talks in Tirana during November 1-8, 1966 is located.

and the subsequently refined Central Committee Plenum resolution of 23 January, 1967.¹⁶⁸ Ideally, the transcripts of the Polish-Vietnamese and Romanian-Vietnamese discussions (as well as those of other contending channels in operation at the time) should be compared with the Vietnamese resolutions to determine their relative impact on the content of those resolutions. However, the reader should bear in mind that even this method renders results that can only be suggestive at best. Hanoi could easily have been influenced by an argument presented much earlier and incorporated into their thinking long before their internal October-November debates, rendering any apparent correlation spurious.

Unfortunately, neither the Polish nor the Vietnamese transcripts of their bilateral discussions during this period have as yet emerged from the archives. That said, James Hershberg has published the diplomatic reports sent by Polish Foreign Minister Rapacki after his conversations with Brezhnev and Trinh in Sofia during 18-19 November as well as those of Ambassador Lewandowski after his consultations with Pham Van Dong in Hanoi on 25 and 28 November, 1966.¹⁶⁹ These reports and cables relay the main points of the Polish presentation to the Vietnamese and thus, presumably, the main lines of Polish argument, permitting very tentative comparison with both the Romanian October-November discussions and the resolutions adopted by Hanoi in November 1966 and January 1967.

To what degree did Polish and Romanian advice correspond to the main points of the new Vietnamese strategy? The main theme of both resolutions, that Hanoi resolved to devote more attention to political and diplomatic efforts along with their military efforts, was a regular element of Soviet bloc advice by mid-1966 and as such offers no clear indication. The same theme appears in two of the Polish November cables and was central and recurrent in the Romanian-Vietnamese discussions.

However, differences appear regarding Hanoi's explanations of why it was modifying its strategy and why it chose that moment to do so. According to the published fragment of the November Politburo resolution – "Intensifying the Military Struggle and the Political Struggle in South Vietnam (October and November 1966)" – the aim of the new approach to negotiations was threefold: (1) to take the offensive "on the diplomatic front," (2) to unmask and expose the insincerity of American calls for peace, and (3) to win international public

¹⁶⁸ Merle Pribbenow, a Vietnam specialist and former CIA analyst for that country, expressed his conviction that the January 1967 resolution was "simply a later rework of the originally approved November 1966 Politburo resolution," which was then "disseminated to various audiences" and modified and reworked it made its "way up to the Central Committee." Hershberg (2012), 237, note 122.

¹⁶⁹ See Documents 6-9, 11-12 in *Cracking a Vietnam War Mystery* (2012)
http://nsarchive.gwu.edu/NSAEBB/NSAEBB369/#_ftnref22.

opinion. Thus, in order to implement the “talk-fight” stratagem, win broader public support and reinforce internal obstacles to America’s conduct and escalation of the war, it was necessary to “take the initiative.”¹⁷⁰

The 23 January, 1967 Plenum resolution presented a more developed and refined version of the new policy line, aptly expressed in its title: “Intensifying diplomatic activities to seize the political initiative and employ our fighting while talking, talking while fighting strategy.”¹⁷¹ On the positive side of the ledger, Hanoi had managed to “retain” both the initiative and policymaking independence. Less positive was the “serious disagreement within the socialist camp,” making Vietnam’s struggle “very complicated and difficult.”¹⁷² Although “fighting while talking, talking while fighting” was generally supported by Vietnam’s allies, the “level of that support varied” and some had “differences with us over strategy or stratagems.” Therefore, keeping allies from going ‘going off the reservation’ was a major concern:

We need to develop a plan to lobby, explain to, and persuade both those fraternal socialist nations that may suspect that we are seeking negotiations too soon and may therefore take an attitude that, directly or indirectly, does not agree with us, and those that are so much in favor of negotiations to settle the problem that they pressure us to reach a political settlement too soon, before the situation is ripe. We must be extremely careful to keep our enemy from exploiting disagreements about strategy between us and our fraternal socialist allies.¹⁷³

International public opinion, although very favorable, did “not yet clearly realize that we could begin talking to the Americans if they stop the bombing of North Vietnam permanently and unconditionally.” It was thus considered necessary to “raise this matter publicly” so that pressure on and within the US “will increase.” The resolution also noted that sympathetic members of the international community did “not want us to totally reject negotiations while we continue fighting.”¹⁷⁴ While still fighting in the South, there could also be “talks between the enemy and ourselves in various forms, ranging from individual contacts to a peace conference.” It was therefore necessary to “intensify our diplomatic

¹⁷⁰ “Politiburo Resolution on Intensifying the Military Struggle and the Political Struggle in South Vietnam (October and November 1966),” as cited in Hershberg (2012), 237, note 121.

¹⁷¹ *Report by Nguyen Duy Trinh to the 13 Plenum of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Vietnam*, January 23, 1967, in Pribbenow (2012), <https://www.wilsoncenter.org/publication/north-vietnams-talk-fight-strategy-and-the-1968-peace-negotiations-the-united-states>.

¹⁷² Ibid.

¹⁷³ Ibid.

¹⁷⁴ Ibid.

struggle by taking the offensive to attack the enemy politically and employing our stratagem of fighting while talking, talking while fighting.”¹⁷⁵

Addressing the all-important question of “why now,” the resolution declared:

- Public opinion is now heated on this subject, and if we do not do something further, it will quiet down. Once that happens, when we raise an issue it will be hard to gain as much attention as we can do at this point in time.
- It is still possible that Johnson will decide to escalate to win over the opposing factions. If that happens, it will be harder for us to employ this stratagem in that situation. Also, if the US sees that we do not take action, they will mount a public offensive and distort and slander our position.
- Our friends may take some misguided action in one direction or another, which would further complicate our effort to utilize this stratagem.¹⁷⁶

Under the heading: “How we will publicly present this question to the world,” the January resolution stipulated that Hanoi would “say something like: Recently, the US has suggested that it would like to talk to the Democratic Republic of Vietnam.” And then it would say: “After the United States has unconditionally ended the bombing and all other acts of war directed against the Democratic Republic of Vietnam, the Democratic Republic of Vietnam and the United States could talk to one another.”¹⁷⁷

Mobilizing greater popular demand to “end the bombing of North Vietnam unconditionally” would also require greater focus on diplomatic activities, “to win additional support from the socialist nations, neutral nations, and the people of the world.”¹⁷⁸ Thus, the resolution stated:

The immediate situation demands that we stay continuously on the offensive and take the initiative in presenting the issue as follows: If the United States ends the bombing permanently and unconditionally, the Democratic Republic of Vietnam and the United States could hold talks.¹⁷⁹

¹⁷⁵ Ibid.

¹⁷⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷⁷ Ibid. Noting that the new policy line would be publicly announced (as it was five days later), the resolution added in parentheses: “The above is the general thrust of the content of our statement, which will be given in the form of an answer by our Foreign Minister during a press interview. After it is written out formally as an answer, we will review the wording and tighten it up.”

¹⁷⁸ Ibid.

¹⁷⁹ Ibid.

Any halt in the bombing would constitute an obvious gain. But Hanoi would gain even “if they do not stop the bombing” because they would be the ones obstructing negotiations, thereby increasing their isolation “in the face of public opinion.” The American dilemma, the resolution pointed out, was that: “They know that if they stop the bombing, we might begin talking to them.” The resolution reiterated throughout that engaging in negotiations – the “talk” in the “talk-fight” strategy – was an offensive measure and not one of capitulation, and that in heeding the council of its allies the DRV would never relinquish its independence:

Our utilization of the “fighting while talking, talking while fighting” stratagem and our effort to seek an early opportunity to present our position, that “after the enemy ends the bombing unconditionally, the Democratic Republic of Vietnam and the United States could begin talks” demonstrates our offensive posture, attacking the enemy politically, and is aimed at placing the enemy on the defensive and isolating him even further. ... Our Party will always maintain its independence, although we will still pay attention to and consult with fraternal countries.¹⁸⁰

Hanoi’s instruction to the COSVN the same day further pared the January resolution down to its most basic essentials while emphasizing the timeliness of informing the world of their willingness to talk if the bombing were halted, taking advantage of current trends in public opinion, and preventing ‘off the reservation’ behavior on the part of their allies. If they failed to move now, the instruction cautioned, “our friends may take actions that stray off course, in one direction or the other, thereby making it more complicated and difficult for us to employ our strategy.”¹⁸¹ At the same time, it underscored that the new approach was completely realistic and not dependent on any overly optimistic reading of American good faith:

We are not being subjective, but we must strive to force the US to end the bombing. It is possible that our struggle will force the US to end the bombing ... Even if it does not, however, we will still benefit from the political standpoint.¹⁸²

¹⁸⁰ Ibid.

¹⁸¹ *Secret North Vietnam Politburo Cable*, January 23, 1967, in Pribbenow (2012), <https://www.wilsoncenter.org/publication/north-vietnams-talk-fight-strategy-and-the-1968-peace-negotiations-the-united-states>.

¹⁸² Ibid.

The instruction outlined in more succinct form, the importance of the new line and how events would proceed, giving a de facto explanation of the difference between contacts and discussions:

If we can do this, at some point we may be able to force the US to actually stop the bombing so that they can hold talks with us. ... Our representatives will receive American representatives when they request contact and will tell the US that the US must stop the bombing of North Vietnam and that if they do stop the bombing, the Democratic Republic of Vietnam and the United States could begin to talk to one another. Later, our Foreign Minister will make a response in an interview with the press to make this primary concept crystal clear.¹⁸³

To the degree that the Plenum resolution and COSVN instruction reflected thinking from the November 1966 Politburo resolution, Hanoi never considered contacts of the sort promised by *MARIGOLD* as a “package deal” that would lead directly to peace talks or possibly even a settlement. The first phase of the strategy sought “to end the bombing of North Vietnam without conditions, leading to official and public contacts between North Vietnam and the United States.” Once the United States agreed to halt the bombing, the instruction stated, “North Vietnam and the United States will talk to one another, not for the purpose of reaching a total settlement of the Vietnam problem, but in order to clarify the position of each side.”¹⁸⁴

Prominent in Hanoi’s November and January resolutions were themes presenting the refocus on diplomacy as an “offensive measure” to “expose” American perfidy, the importance of “taking the initiative,” maintaining policymaking independence, ensuring communication with allies, and the necessity of clearly declaring the DRV’s willingness to accept negotiations to international sympathizers and to the American public. The January resolution and the instruction to the COSVN the same day both list three motivations for the introduction of the new policy line at this time: (1) to take advantage currently favorable opinion and avoid the potential loss of international support; (2) to prevent a new US military escalation and counter US propaganda; and (3) to prevent further ‘off the reservation’ behavior by Hanoi’s allies that could undermine its strategy and the achievement of its aims.

¹⁸³ Ibid

¹⁸⁴ Report by Nguyen Duy Trinh to the 13 Plenum of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Vietnam, January 23, 1967, in Pribbenow (2012), <https://www.wilsoncenter.org/publication/north-vietnams-talk-fight-strategy-and-the-1968-peace-negotiations-the-united-states>.

Few of these are reflected in the Polish advice proffered to Foreign Minister Trinh and Prime Minister Pham Van Dong during 18-28 November, 1966. The arguments employed in *MARIGOLD*'s ten points, formulated in close consultation with the US and Italian diplomats, represented for the most part the perspectives of the United States and the Soviet Union and incorporated presumptions of US good faith and sincerity.¹⁸⁵ They included declarations of 1) US interest in negotiated peace; 2) assurance that negotiations were not equivalent to capitulation; 3) lack of US interest in prolonging its military presence; 4) US willingness to discuss all problems; 5) US acceptance of all-inclusive elections and their supervision; 6) US agreement that the issue of unification was to be "settled by Vietnamese themselves after peace and proper representative organs are established"; 7) US acceptance of South Vietnamese neutrality; 8) US willingness to cease bombing and not force DRV acknowledgement of its infiltration in the South; 9) US rejection of 'reunification under military pressure'; and 10) US refusal to "declare now or in the future its acceptance of North Vietnam's 4 or 5 points."¹⁸⁶

Nowhere in the discussions with the Vietnamese did Rapacki or Lewandowski advocate the use of diplomacy as an offensive measure or suggest that talks could be used to "expose" US insincerity. Indeed, their position that the Americans were now more sincere because of political, financial, and reputational considerations precluded such arguments. Although it does not appear in the Rapacki and Lewandowski cables, the "talk-fight" strategy was referred to indirectly in the Polish analysis, which stated that acceptance of negotiations would still allow "for a continuation" of fighting in South Vietnam.¹⁸⁷ However, this does not appear as a main point of argument and the analysis addresses none of the advantages of "Talk-Fight."

The Poles neither stressed nor raised the need for the North Vietnamese to take the initiative and retain independent control over their policy making process. Both ideas, in fact, ran against the Moscow line claiming a "leading role" for the Soviet Union in foreign and security policy within the socialist community, and were thus impossible for Warsaw to advocate. Rapacki's lack of response to Brezhnev's comments regarding the necessity of "wearing down" the Vietnamese so that they would modify their policy in conformity with

¹⁸⁵ These communications are reproduced in *Cracking a Vietnam War Mystery* (2012), http://nsarchive.gwu.edu/NSAEBB/NSAEBB369/#_ftnref22

¹⁸⁶ Part VI. C. 2, Settlement of the Conflict, History of Contacts, Polish Track, *Pentagon Papers*, pp. 60-61.

¹⁸⁷ *The Polish Analysis*, Document 10 in *Cracking a Vietnam War Mystery* (2012).

Soviet bloc interests suggests the opposite preference – the transfer of initiative and policymaking authority from Hanoi to the Kremlin.¹⁸⁸

None of the Polish advice expressed the slightest concern for ‘off the reservation’ behavior by the DRV’s allies. While both Rapacki and Lewandowski did raise the issue of international sympathy for North Vietnam regarding the bombing, they did not dwell on the possibility that Hanoi’s continued failure to engage diplomatically could cost it the support of international public opinion. Lewandowski and Rapacki do appear to suggest that engaging the Americans at this time could help to avoid further US military escalation but neither suggested that failure to engage would grant Washington the propaganda advantage. However, Rapacki may have had this in mind when he volunteered to Trinh his opinion that the American aim in agreeing to the contact was not for propaganda purposes: “At least not for now.”¹⁸⁹

Although Pham Van Dong reacted to Lewandowski in an optimistic manner on November 25, 1966, stating that Hanoi would give the attempt a chance, he expressed doubts about US sincerity:

It is not known if the USA will realize a meeting. It is not known if they will confirm Lodge’s expressions or if they will come out with something else. ... It cannot be ruled out that in the USA the pro-war wing will prevail.¹⁹⁰

The bulk of Polish advice advocated Vietnamese engagement with the US based on a series of internal and international economic and political constraints that hypothetically compelled greater US sincerity regarding peace negotiations. Several of these constraints reappear in the January resolution, although none as argument for greater US sincerity. While the chances of American sincerity were dubbed as “pretty even” by Warsaw, Polish

¹⁸⁸ Polish memorandum of conversation between Polish foreign minister Adam Rapacki and Soviet leader Leonid Brezhnev, Sofia, Bulgaria, November 19, 1966, Document 9 in *Cracking a Vietnam War Mystery*, (2012). Brezhnev “reiterated” Soviet intention to “gradually erode a path for the Vietnamese to come to a proper [correct] understanding of the situation and conclusions that arise from that.”

¹⁸⁹ Polish memorandum of conversation between Polish foreign minister Adam Rapacki and North Vietnamese foreign minister Nguyen Duy Trinh leader, Sofia, Bulgaria, November 19, 1966, Document 8 in *Cracking a Vietnam War Mystery* (2012).

¹⁹⁰ Hershberg (2012), p. 232. The Vietnamese prime minister signaled that Hanoi would make a preliminary judgment of US seriousness based on “who the USA – if it decides to come to the meeting – delegates,” arguing that “should their intention be serious then surely they will not delegate a minor official.” *Ciphered telegram from Lewandowski in Hanoi reporting on Conversation with North Vietnamese Premier Pham Van Dong*, November 28, 1966, Document 12 in *Cracking a Vietnam War Mystery*, (2012). Whether Hanoi considered the US Ambassador in Poland senior enough is open to question. Designation of the ambassador certainly did not dissuade Hanoi from sending its representative.

argumentation was based on a presumption of that sincerity.¹⁹¹ According to the Poles, they had the “impression” that the Americans had “decided for some time to take the risk” of a bombing cessation because they preferred not to expend the additional military resources and time that success would require; the clear implication being that the United States was perfectly capable of so doing and thus achieving victory if its preferences changed.

This was a major point of difference between Warsaw’s approach and that of both Bucharest and Hanoi. The Poles were still working on the presumption that the United States could win militarily by dedicating more resources and time to the war.¹⁹² Hanoi and Bucharest, in contrast, accepted as a given the lack of any prospects for American military victory in Vietnam. In Polish (and Soviet) perspective, the constraints on American behavior were those of its own preference rather than any fundamental incapacity. Thus, the burden of compromise fell upon Hanoi if it wished to avoid defeat.

Warsaw also maintained that the Johnson administration needed to end to the war before the 1968 presidential elections and was averse to paying the financial and international public opinion costs of escalation, neither of which proved to be the case. Another point on which Warsaw oversold Washington’s willingness to compromise concerned its alleged move “away from the concept of de-escalation in which the DRV side would have to withdrawn its military from the South and to cease infiltrations.” The Poles argued that the United States did “not require any concrete political or military action from the DRV side” to cease their bombing unconditionally, only “some signal from the DRV side.”¹⁹³

This was rather the same bill of goods that US authorities attempted to sell Bucharest on October 22, 1966, insisting that North Vietnam “only needed to give ‘an indication as to what [it] would do in response to a prior cessation of bombing by the US.’”¹⁹⁴ In fact, Washington’s proclamations concerning “mutual reciprocity” – that the US would cease bombing only in return for either a withdrawal of North Vietnamese forces from South Vietnam or stoppage, or at least a slowdown, of North Vietnamese “infiltration” into the

¹⁹¹ *Polish memorandum of conversation between Polish foreign minister Adam Rapacki and North Vietnamese foreign minister Nguyen Duy Trinh leader*, Sofia, Bulgaria, November 19, 1966, Document 8; *The Polish Analysis*, Document 10; and *Ciphered telegram from Lewandowski in Hanoi reporting on Conversation with North Vietnamese Premier Pham Van Dong*, November 25, 1966, Document 11 in *Cracking a Vietnam War Mystery* (2012); Hershberg (2012), p. 229.

¹⁹² This assumption is rather bluntly stated in Warsaw’s analysis forwarded to Lewandowski in Hanoi: “A sober assessment of the course of the war and resistance by the DRV and NLF indicates to the USA government that victory can be achieved solely by a very marked increase in the military and financial effort. This will require a lot of time. Political costs will grow.” *The Polish Analysis* in *Ibid*.

¹⁹³ *Ibid*

¹⁹⁴ USUN New York 1777 to SecState (Secret-NODIS), 22 October 1966, “Romanian-North Vietnamese Contacts, October 1966-November 1967,” *Pentagon Papers*, (1997), Part VI. C. 4., p. 248.

South – were almost perfectly ambiguous. Even when they seemed clear, they were contradicted by other senior figures in the administration.¹⁹⁵ In fact, the insistence on mutual reciprocity remained the bedrock position of the Johnson administration all the way up until October 1968.

The Polish approach in mid-late November was designed to establish a specific contact that Warsaw hoped would lead to peace talks. It was predicated on a presumption of American willingness to engage in negotiations that did not imply Hanoi's capitulation, which subsequent events proved untrue. The bulk of Lewandowski's 10 points reaffirmed American sincerity and willingness to engage. None of them can be found in either of the Vietnamese resolutions. Although several of the factors Warsaw hypothesized as constraining US policy choices do reappear in those resolutions, they are not assigned the same degree of influence or criticality.

Romanian Footprints

In contrast, Romanian advice was neither linked to any specific American initiative nor did it require any presumption of sincerity or flexibility on the part of US authorities. However, rather than simply denying American sincerity, Bucharest urged Hanoi to put it to the test by responding to US peace initiatives in a public manner. The central point of both resolutions was the treatment of negotiations as a offensive weapon in order to unmask probable American insincerity, mobilize public opinion both within the United States and internationally against US bombing and the continuation of the war, and further hinder the administration's ability to conduct military operations in Vietnam.

The Romanians had provided three arguments for accepting negotiations in return for a cessation of bombing: (1) to curb 'off the reservation' behavior by its allies and prevent any *fait accompli* attempt to hijack the initiative from Hanoi and impose a solution serving non-Vietnamese interests; (2) to prevent the withering of international sympathy because of non-response; and (3) to lend support to internal US opposition to the war and to the anti-war trend within the US administration. These points were reflected in the January, September and October discussions (and the post-discussion deliberation of the RCP Political Executive Committee) and then reiterated in the November conversations with Trinh. [[Documents 7, 28, 30, 37, 38](#)]

¹⁹⁵ For example, the message from the US Ambassador to the UN, requiring only some unspecified "signal," was contradicted on the very same day by acting Secretary of State Nicholas Katzenbach, who insisted that the US required prior specific knowledge of Hanoi's response. STATE 71460 to AmEmbassy Manila, Manila TOSEC 52, 22 October 1966 in *Pentagon Papers* (1997), Part VI. C. 4., p. 249.

In the 3-4 October, 1966 discussions Vietnamese authorities told their Romanian interlocutors that “permanent and unconditional” cessation of US bombing against North Vietnam was a litmus test for US sincerity in possible future negotiations. In their view, “only through the cessation of the aggressive acts against the North” could the war be limited and “the good faith of the USA be put to the test.” However, Pham Van Dong added, since there was “no crumb of good faith on the part of the Americans” it was “totally impossible for us to begin negotiations.” [[Document 30](#)]

This distrust of the Johnson administration had proven the immovable object for more than one mediation effort. Hanoi observed first-hand the military escalations and troop deployments in South Vietnam that had accompanied virtually every US peace initiative up to that point. Convincing the Vietnamese that America truly desired peace when their baseline of assessment was actual US policy behavior to the contrary constituted an insurmountable hurdle for quite a few would-be intermediaries. Others fell afoul of Hanoi by assuming the role of US spokespersons, arguing too strongly for the acceptance of US demands and in favor of American sincerity.

The fate of the Canadian effort was illustrative of the problem. Pham Van Dong recounted to Maurer that he had “contacts with the Canadian [Chester] Ronning” on two occasions. On the first:

I received him and defined our posture – the 4 points – as well as our claims regarding the North. Before departing, he let it be understood that there is a glimmer of a chance for reaching a solution of the problem. He went to communicate all of this to Prime Minister [Lester] Pearson and, after that, to the Americans. Then he received a note from the USA through which we are asked, as compensation for the cessation of the bombing, to end the hostilities in the South, [and] to withdraw our assistance to those in the South, or something similar. Since that time we no longer received him and we communicated to him that it is unnecessary to come here as the spokesman of an impossible message. He had not come, as he claimed, as a man of good faith but as a representative of the USA [[Document 30](#)]

Romania avoided this pitfall by approaching the problem from the diametrically opposite direction. Stressing engagement in negotiations as an offensive or “combat weapon,” to further the struggle rather than to conclude an ill-favored peace, mitigated entirely any requirement to rely upon American good faith or to expose oneself and one’s credibility to any sudden treachery on the part of the Johnson administration. If the Americans were indeed bluffing then a positive Vietnamese response would force

Washington either to put its money where its mouth was – to take steps towards peace talks and curtail aggressive operations against North Vietnam – or to be shown up as obstructing a peaceful solution.

This approach was attractive to Hanoi. Although it struggled with its own distrust of the United States as well as with belligerent Chinese insistence on military operations, the DRV leadership was very much interested in moving the conflict from the military to the political-diplomatic plane so long as it did not compromise their fundamental goals of independence and unification. As Dong told Maurer in October:

We agree with you that we must intensify political actions. In this regard you are perfectly right. ... We, the Vietnamese, are conscious that this effort was insufficient and we regret it. ... Regarding diplomatic activity, it is true that we could have done more. In the days and months that follow, we will study better this problem.

[\[Document 30\]](#)

Maurer underscored that DRV insistence that the timing and conditions for negotiations were “not yet ripe” was the “single point on which our opinions are not in accord.” According to Maurer:

We consider there to be an advantage in beginning if not negotiations then talks, while preserving intact and intensifying the war effort. We have told you the advantages ... These advantages are, without a doubt, hypothetical. There is no certainty in this domain and we do not have the possibility of demonstrating these advantages mathematically, as we can say that one and one make two. ... We will think further on this problem. I believe that you will do so as well. [\[Document 30\]](#)

Vietnamese lack of faith in American sincerity continued to block progress towards negotiations, especially since Hanoi feared the demobilization of its hard-pressed population and a weakened bargaining position should negotiations be accepted. The Romanians, in contrast, attempted to demonstrate that all of their potential vulnerabilities could be managed at minimal cost. Recounting those arguments, Pham Van Dong observed that the Romanians considered that:

- “The problem of talks with the USA could be raised independently of any other problems, regardless of their importance”;
- “The talks cannot in any way influence the general situation, especially the military situation. On the one hand there are talks and, on the other, the fight continues”;

- “Talks could be started on any other problems because they do not tie our hands.”
[[Document 30](#)]

The Vietnamese, however, wanted “especially to put the good faith of the adversary to the test, because if our adversary is not of good faith, then what results could talks give?” Thus, aggressive actions against the DRV – especially the bombing – had to cease before talks could be considered. On the contrary, the Romanian delegation pointed out, the two approaches were not mutually exclusive:

The problem that arises is this: knowing the intentions of the Americans, knowing that their words about peace negotiations are designed to conceal their war-like actions, that they are designed to conceal new steps in the escalation of the war, is it or is it not necessary to undertake political and diplomatic actions?

According to the Romanians:

There is nothing to lose if, while developing the struggle further, we beat the enemy not only on the battlefield but also on political and diplomatic terrain. ... You see, the Americans wave their intentions about in an effective manner. What do we have to lose if, while doing everything to strengthen combat capacities, while preparing for any possibility, we take this political weapon out of their hands [and] unmask them through political and diplomatic means in order to show public opinion that everything the Americans say is not true. ... [I]f we succeed in unmasking the American plans along this path, we will make their ability to conduct the war even more difficult and, without a doubt, this will also influence the development of the war. [[Document 30](#)]

The beauty of this approach was that it neither depended upon nor even expected American sincerity but it did allow for that possibility. If Washington successfully passed Hanoi’s sincerity test and ceased bombing then the benefit to Vietnam was obvious, the population of North Vietnam would be relieved, and both sides would have moved one step closer to genuine peace negotiations. If the Americans proved insincere then Hanoi would still benefit as wider circles of public opinion were made aware of US duplicity and greater pressure were exerted on the United State both internationally and domestically. Pham Van Dong found this line of argument persuasive:

You have underscored the idea that one can profit from talks by unmasking the enemy. This is an idea. It is not a question of us reaching a certain result with the adversary, but

this will help us to unmask him. This is an idea. In any case, I tell you sincerely that we will study all of these problems.

Pham Van Dong even confessed that this was how they had proceeded in their fight for independence from France. Quiet “negotiations with the French started unofficially long before the battle of Dien Bien Phu” and culminated in the Geneva Conference, which convened, Dong emphasized, only one day *after* that decisive battle. The DRV prime minister found other aspects of approaching negotiations as an offensive tactic attractive as well, in particular, that “the talks would be of a nature to bring great disorder among the ranks of the American military combatants and those of Saigon.” For these reasons, Dong affirmed, “in the months ahead, we will study this problem in the most profound manner.”

Bucharest pointed out that the Vietnamese refusal to engage in negotiations because of the US strategic bombing campaign against North Vietnam played directly into the hands of those advocating further military escalation. If a peace channel showed even the remotest signs of productivity it could be shut down simply by ordering another sortie and, since Hanoi had neither publicly committed to nor even accepted the possibility of negotiations, the responsibility for continued hostilities remained unclear to the rest of the world. To remedy this, the Vietnamese had to broadcast their desire for negotiations as clearly and frequently as the Americans, while designating the US bombing of North Vietnam as the singular hurdle to talks. A bombing cessation and negotiations would still be linked, but in a manner that granted leverage to Hanoi rather than to Washington.

Niculescu-Mizil underscored the fact that most of the world already opposed the US bombing, thus providing Hanoi and its allies with “everything necessary” to “undertake a great world-wide diplomatic and political action on the problem of ceasing the bombing of North Vietnam”:

Not even the capitalist countries that support the USA can agree with such a barbaric act. When Hanoi and Haiphong were bombed, [British Prime Minister Harold] Wilson, otherwise a friend of the USA, declared that he does not agree with such an escalation of the war. Thus, the bombing of D. R. Vietnam by Americans is an act around which a very serious political and diplomatic campaign could be developed.
[\[Document 30\]](#)

To Pham Van Dong’s question: “How do we make the Americans leave?” the Romanians answered that an increased political-diplomatic effort within the “Talk-Fight”

strategy was required because neither side was in a position to gain a purely military victory. According to Maurer:

There is no other possibility than through the force of arms and the force of the political struggle. Using only military force, it is evident that we diminish considerably our means. In order to make them leave militarily you must have military superiority, and realizing the necessary superiority over the Americans in order to throw them into the sea is a difficult thing. We must combine these two forms of struggle. We should create the conditions necessary to force them to abandon Vietnam since military superiority cannot be assured. [[Document 30](#)]

Dong agreed with Maurer that this was precisely what happened in Algeria, where “they fought, but at the same time, they talked.” “Talk-Fight” was in fact an approach common to smaller states occupied by larger military forces, and both the Vietnamese and the Romanians had previously resorted to it over the course of the centuries. Maurer further pointed out that, although preferable, this strategy did not require a “positive personality” such as De Gaulle proved to be in the French withdrawal from Algeria. The operative factor was not the personal proclivity of US leaders but the “pressure of public opinion,” both internationally and within the United States.

Gaining International Support

Since international public opinion was critical to the strategy, international concerns had to be addressed as clearly and unequivocally as possible. Typical of the confusion regarding Vietnamese goals was the public reaction of Danish Prime Minister Jens Krag: “I do not understand why the Vietnamese refuse to discuss things.” Turkish Prime Minister Sulimen Demirel raised the problem with Maurer in almost exactly the same manner:

I will ask you a question and please respond sincerely, because I am trying to understand things a little. Why this rigidity on the part of the Vietnamese, is it not the consequence of a political conception that foresees the launching of a world war in order to accelerate Communist takeover? [[Document 30](#)]

After the Vietnamese had recovered from their laughter, Maurer explained how “this question was constantly put to me,” even in “countries that do not contest the aggressive character of the American military actions in Vietnam and the justice of the Vietnamese

resistance.” In short, Hanoi’s rejection of negotiations and diplomatic inaction was undermining its position and could cost it support that it now enjoyed.

On the positive side, Maurer explained, “Vietnam benefits from a pronounced sympathy on the part of many countries, even those engaged in very close military and political alliance with the USA” Moreover, “even in the bosom of American public opinion, one can observe a rather great repulsion towards the war that the USA prosecutes in Vietnam; there is a rather large number of people there conscious of the stupidity of this war.” Thus, “under the current circumstances, it would be possible to use this atmosphere in order to place pressure on the USA”

However, the Romanian underscored, the Americans disseminated their perspective far more effectively than the Vietnamese, and Hanoi would continue to suffer on this front unless something was “done to counter US propaganda”:

Of course, viewing things from Bucharest, and not from Hanoi, we have calculated that it is possible to say, for example, “Our political position, our objectives, our aims are these. We will continue to maintain them with arms in hand until the moment when they are achieved. However, because you say that you do not want to impose any regime on the Vietnamese people, let’s talk anyway.” [[Document 30](#)]

Such an approach would solidify support from current sympathizers and win over others, gradually leading to an international quorum “as the efforts of many more parties conjugate.” This approach would also win over “American public opinion, where the large percentage of undecided people will probably adhere to those who say they must end the war, that the Americans must leave Vietnam.” Maurer reiterated that this advice was not based on any presumption that the US intended to abandon South Vietnam. However:

If the means will be found to make this debate more public, it could in the end demonstrate what is the real value of the declarations made by the Americans. In other words, the Americans could be unmasked and this unmasking could increase the pressure from those [Americans] who desire an end to the war [as well as] the pressure exerted on the USA [from abroad]. [[Document 30](#)]

This effect, the Romanian prime minister pointed out, would not “be immediate.” But over the longer term the use of political action “in parallel with the armed struggle” would almost certainly bring the Vietnamese closer to their desire ends.

You cannot calculate the chances with any precision but, theoretically, there is even a possibility that the Americans will reach the conclusion that wisdom dictates, and say: “We accept the conditions that you raise within the framework of our negotiations.”

[\[Document 30\]](#)

Rogue Initiatives and Off-The-Reservation Behavior

Another problem at the center of Romanian attention ever since the Vietnamese had first informed them of it in May 1965 was that of counterproductive initiatives and actions by the other socialist allies. These resulted partly from the disunity within the socialist camp, especially but not only the Sino-Soviet split. In part, the problem was also an emanation of Soviet great power biases. And, in part, it resulted from misdirected efforts to compel Vietnam to end the war by other “fraternal” allies.

Moscow’s bias was evident in the advice it proffered to Hanoi in February 1965 to shift from the military struggle to negotiations based on the premise that victory would inevitably belong to the side possessing military superiority. This “indisputable truth” was embedded in the thinking of Soviet political and military leaders, incorporated into Soviet planning for the Warsaw Pact and reflected in the planning and thinking of Moscow’s loyalist allies.

As noted, Soviet, Polish and Czechoslovak assessments uniformly held that Hanoi overestimated Vietnamese military accomplishments and staying power while underestimating American capabilities and the impact of US operations.¹⁹⁶ These pessimistic assessments of Vietnamese capabilities and morale paralleled closely those of the US Joint Chiefs of Staff and senior administration officials, reflecting a shared bias on the utility and applicability of superior military force. Of course, while the bloc viewed these alleged “overestimations” and “underestimations” with pessimism, US authorities viewed them optimistically, as harbingers of the eventual success of US military operations. As it turned out, both Washington and Moscow were wrong.

Addressing the Polish case, and after pointing out that Gomulka’s support for the Vietnamese effort was not in question, Maurer observed that the Polish leader’s “manner of thinking about these problems” incorporated the Soviet bias:

¹⁹⁶ *Reception by Soviet Vice Foreign Minister V. V. Kuznetsov for the General Director of the PRP FMA, Cde. Jerzy Michalowski*, 24 January 1966, Document 16 in *CWIHP Bulletin* No. 16 (Fall 2007-Winter 2008): 387-88; Hersberg (2012): 58; and “Information on the Visit of a Czechoslovak Party and Government Delegation Headed by [Prime Minister] Comrade Lenart in North Vietnam, 24-28 September 1966,” <http://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/117740>.

It is no secret to you, for example, that some comrades such as comrade Gomulka, harbor certain special ideas. I have the impression that he believes that a victory of the Americans must be translated into fact, at the moment when they employ enough military means. This implies a certain orientation. This explains the idea, which I have the impression that he harbors, with regard to the necessity of negotiations and the idea of replacing the armed struggle with negotiations. [[Document 30](#)]

Maurer's impression of Hungarian initiatives was similar; that they were based on "rather confused conceptions regarding the precise definition of the situation, of the aims and the objectives to be attained, as well as of the means that should be used." Even Beijing was undercutting Hanoi's position, albeit in a very different manner. Maurer cited a recent declaration by Chinese President Liu Shaoqi that the Geneva Accords "had lost any value." According to Maurer:

The Geneva Accords are very important. They constitute the essential justification of your position, of our position. If these accords did not exist the problem could be raised in the manner: do you have the right to exist or not? Given that, any declaration must be viewed with utmost attention, avoiding those that not only do not serve but even turn against us. [[Document 30](#)]

Pham Van Dong interjected that he had asked the Chinese about Liu Shaoqi's remark and was told "that if sometimes they take certain liberties, they do it only for propagandistic aims, valid for a specific situation." To this Maurer confessed that his advanced age might have impaired his faculties somewhat but he could "not understand this rationale":

The Americans are not part of the Geneva Accords. They did not sign these accords, they have not assumed their obligations and thus they can contest these accords. ... But if there is a representative of a socialist country who says to "no longer preserve the Geneva Accords," it is easy for the Americans to come and say: If you can do without the accords that you have signed, what do you want us to do with them?

The Geneva Accords are international accords. ... They must be respected because the interested parties at their conclusion have signed them. These things must be seen as they are because otherwise we could wake up to some rather nasty surprises. We cannot permit juridical fantasies *ad infinitum*. We must proceed with great attention because there are certain things that can be turned against us. [[Document 30](#)]

Reconciling these divergent and counterproductive approaches, the Romanians believed, required better communications between Hanoi, Moscow and the other fraternal allies “in order to furnish these comrades with the data that can assist them in reaching more precise appreciations.” Preventing strategic and tactical divergence could also be achieved by requiring Hanoi’s prior approval for all initiatives or analyses related to the conflict. As Maurer stressed, “greater work must be devoted to assuring a unitary point of view on the Vietnamese problem.”

Exposing the truth or falsity of US negotiation offers would also help to rein in the off-the-reservation behavior of Vietnam’s socialist allies. The Romanians had sometimes “rather heated” discussions with the Yugoslavs, Hungarians, Poles and Czechoslovaks over their *de facto* support for US peace initiatives that undermined Hanoi’s policy. For instance, Maurer continued, the sense of Gomulka’s proposal at the July 1966 Warsaw Pact meeting was “to press Vietnam towards negotiations with non-socialist countries – clearly referring to the United States of America – without any principled basis,” and to “replace the armed struggle” with negotiations. The Romanians rejected that proposal with the argument that “to accept that point of view means to push the Vietnamese to capitulation.”¹⁹⁷

Given the above, we consider that, without ceasing for a moment the armed struggle, it is well to find the means for beginning talks, which will contribute, among other things, also to opening the eyes of these comrades. We find this tactic useful for strengthening the solidarity of the socialist countries with the struggle of the Vietnamese people. [[Document 30](#)]

The Romanians rejected Polish and Hungarian proposals to discuss and coordinate assistance to Vietnam without the participation of Hanoi (and Beijing) for the same reason:

[Such a] proposal could be suspected as being an attempt to constitute a supranational organism and a means of pressure in order to determine a certain course of the policies of the Government of Vietnam and of the National Liberation Front. Given

¹⁹⁷ *Minutes of the Romanian Party Politburo Meeting, Report on the PCC Meeting by the General Secretary of the PCR (Nicolae Ceaușescu)*, July 12, 1966, PHP. Reports from the other Pact members confirm the Romanian version. According to Hungarian leader János Kádár, singular Romanian refusal to accept the Soviet *fait accompli* regarding a declaration on Vietnam led to an “inhuman, nearly one-and-a-half or two-day dispute,” during which Gomulka complained that “it was not the six parties that were trying to put pressure on them [the Romanians], but it was they who were putting pressure on the six parties.” Another Hungarian Politburo member acknowledged that “in some respects,” the Romanians “are right, their position has prevailed.” *Minutes of the Hungarian Politburo Session – Report on the PCC Meeting by the First Secretary of the Hungarian Socialist Workers’ Party (János Kádár)*, July 12, 1966, in *Ibid.* See also *Bulgarian Minutes of the PCC Meeting*, July 4, 1966, in *Ibid.*

that, we said that we were not in agreement, that it is not possible to discuss this without the accord of the Vietnamese and without having the agreement of all of the socialist states that help Vietnam.¹⁹⁸ [[Document 30](#)]

To avoid similarly counterproductive moves, Hanoi would have to reclaim the initiative. The DRV had to assert veto and approval control over initiatives regarding the war generated by its “fraternal” allies or risk continual, primarily inadvertent sabotage:

We consider that the Vietnam issue is an issue for the Vietnamese; that the Vietnamese comrades are in a better position than anyone else to decide the tasks and the forms for reaching the objectives. Vietnam is their country. They are ones who have suffered aggression. The right of the Vietnamese people to dispose of its own fate, of its own destiny, is being raised in discussions and no one other than the Vietnamese people is in a position to establish the tasks and forms of struggle. This is our position of principle with regard to noninterference in the affairs of others and it is, above all, especially [applicable to] the Vietnam issue. [[Document 30](#)]

Trinh’s Visit to Bucharest: November 21-23, 1966

Controlling “off the reservation” behavior by its allies was clearly a priority for Hanoi and one of the three reasons given in both the January 1967 Plenum resolution and the instruction to the COSVN for the timing of the “Talk-Fight” strategy.¹⁹⁹ Le Duc Tho had complained about such behavior while in Bucharest in May 1965 and the Romanians had been actively combatting the problem since at least January 1966. [[Documents 3, 8, 9, 10, 12, 13, 14](#)] As Ceausescu noted in mid-January, the “clear” intention of Moscow and Warsaw in pressing for a conference on the conflict was “to bring in China and Vietnam” and then “pressure them to accept negotiations.”²⁰⁰

Moscow’s approach was to link alleged Chinese culpability for delays and difficulties in the transportation of supplies to Vietnam with the necessity of a coordinated effort that excluded China.²⁰¹ In May 1966, the chief of Romania’s state security apparatus asked the Soviet charge d’affaires whether a recent Chinese criticism of Moscow was not a “response”

¹⁹⁸ The Hungarian proposal was presented during Kádár’s official visit to Romania (May 10-11, 1966).

¹⁹⁹ The January resolution referred to the tendency of allies to “go off in different directions,” thereby “compromising” Hanoi’s efforts. The instruction to the COSVN spoke of allies that “stray from the path” and “make more difficult” Vietnam’s struggle.

²⁰⁰ *Notes from Meeting of the Permanent Presidium of the Romanian Communist Party*, January 16, 1966, ANR, RCP Chancellery Files, 5/1966, p. 11 as cited in Munteanu (2012): 72.

²⁰¹ The Cultural Revolution did have a negative impact on shipments but the phenomenon was fairly marginal and temporary, and in any case was not intended by authorities in Beijing.

to Soviet Defense Minister Malinovski's claim that Beijing "was making the transport of assistance to Vietnam difficult." Avoiding the central question, the Soviet diplomat insisted on the fact that "difficulties in the transport of assistance to the D.R. Vietnam have occurred."²⁰² Soviets officials "returned numerous times to the issue of the necessity for the coordination and unity of the efforts of all of the socialist countries for according support and assistance to Vietnam" in their report on the August 1966 visit of a Vietnamese delegation to Moscow.²⁰³ The problem, the Soviet ambassador insisted, was not just Beijing's refusal to participate or its "lack of unity," but also its "openly adversarial position" to Soviet aid proposals:

This is the position of China under circumstances in which the USSR and the socialist countries of Europe are far from Vietnam, when not one of the fraternal states, with the exception of China, disposes of aerodromes and military bases close to Vietnam, depriving the socialist states of the possibility of concentrating the necessary quantity of aviation units and other means of defense capable of giving a riposte to the American aggressors and of defending the D. R. Vietnam.²⁰⁴

How to handle third party initiatives that were dysfunctional to Hanoi's strategy – along with the more general problem of socialist disunity – had been a central topic during Romanian-Vietnamese talks in May and October. This was also the central issue that Ceausescu, Maurer and Bodnaras had raised with Trinh on 21 November, and it may have been a proximate cause for launching the new strategy. From the start, Bucharest had been troubled by what appeared to it as an unwarranted push by the other bloc members to organize a supranational structure in order to coordinate all assistance to Vietnam. Its similarity to other "coordination" initiatives sponsored by the Kremlin in order to reassert or strengthen its control of the other bloc members and their military, political and economic policies immediately raised Romanian hackles.

Throughout 1966 Bucharest ran interference to prevent the creation of any entity or process that could be used to leverage Hanoi's policy and reduce its ability to make independent decisions regarding the war. By the end of October, Soviet bloc insistence on

²⁰² *Note of Conversation, Comrade Alexandru Draghici received in audience Charge d'Affaires of the USSR in Bucharest, Comrade Ilyushin, ANR, C.C. al P.C.R., Secția Relații Externe, dosar 181/1966, 20 May 1966/July 22, 1966, f. 81-82.*

²⁰³ *Information of the CPSU CC Referring to the Discussions in Moscow with the Party and Government Delegation from the D. R. Vietnam, August 10-16, 1966, Annex to Transcript of Reception by Comrade Nicolae Ceausescu of Comrade A. V. Basov, USSR Ambassador in Bucharest, September 19, 1966, ANR, C.C. al P.C.R., Secția Relații Externe, dosar 118/1966, f. 17.*

²⁰⁴ *Ibid.*

coordinating assistance despite refusals from Hanoi and Beijing appeared to confirm an intention to forcibly modify Vietnamese policy while ostracizing and isolating China. Budapest's account of the extraordinary meeting of communist leaders in Moscow during 19-22 October corroborates Romanian impressions of a gathering quorum within the bloc for coordinating assistance and leveraging Vietnamese policy.

According to Hungarian leader János Kádár, the Chinese had to be condemned for "sabotaging our joint efforts" and "the socialist countries should convene to coordinate the transportation of goods for Vietnam."²⁰⁵ Bulgarian leader Todor Zhivkov blamed China for "hindering our unity" and called for a bloc policy that no longer heeded Hanoi, "which only reflects the opinion of the Vietnamese and the Chinese parties." Brezhnev, Gomulka and Czechoslovak leader Antonin Novotny all demanded the public denunciation of China and called for greater "coordination" of assistance.²⁰⁶ Gomulka further argued against increasing aid to North Vietnam, claiming that:

The Polish ships are docked in the Haiphong harbor without being discharged for months. Most of the goods unshipped get damaged because the Vietnamese comrades are unable to transport them to their destination.²⁰⁷

The Hungarians reported that Ceausescu defended Vietnamese insistence on "protecting their homeland," reported that Hanoi was fully satisfied with the amounts of aid it was receiving and suggested that time and effort were better spent on mobilizing public opinion than attempting to centrally control material assistance to Vietnam:

The Vietnamese told comrade Maurer that every socialist country was helping them, and they laid particular stress on the Soviet Union and China. Pham Van Dong emphasized that all the supplies coming from the socialist countries arrived at their destination in full and on time. The Romanian party does not want to question the words of the Vietnamese, so it does not want to condemn any socialist country in this issue. Vietnam could be better assisted if the general public of the whole world was mobilized.²⁰⁸

²⁰⁵ Hungarian *Report on the Summit Meeting of Nine Communist Countries' Leaders of 16-22 October 1966*, October 27, 1966, PHP.

²⁰⁶ Ibid.

²⁰⁷ Ibid. According to the CIA, "in outspoken comments last week, Kosygin blamed Peking for continued 'US aggression' in Vietnam, and Brezhnev hinted that China, 'the only Socialist country bordering Vietnam,' is continuing to harass the transshipment of Soviet military aid to North Vietnam." *Central Intelligence Bulletin*, October 19, 1966, "USSR: Gathering of Communist leaders represents Soviet victory over Peking," p. 2.

²⁰⁸ Ibid.

According to this evidence, Romania played the key role in blocking Soviet efforts to control material supplies to Vietnam. While the Pact members did decide to “convene to discuss the content and the methods of the diplomatic offensive aimed at helping Vietnam,” Romanian opposition compelled them to drop that effort:

Taking into consideration that after the Romanian rejection the Polish comrades also find it undesirable, the Politburo removes from the agenda the proposal, which would aim at convening an inter-party meeting, to discuss issues related to the transportation of supplies to Vietnam.²⁰⁹

Hanoi had been faced with pressures from both Beijing and Moscow to break off its relations with the other since the beginning of the war. Institutionalizing Soviet-sponsored coordination of assistance to Vietnam would have accomplished the latter by excluding the Chinese, reinforcing Moscow’s control over bloc member foreign policies, and undoubtedly provoking countermeasures from Beijing whose negative impact would be felt by Vietnam primarily. Despite flippant Soviet claims that China’s land links to North Vietnam were not absolutely critical, alternative routes through Vietnamese ports or other countries were either highly vulnerable or extraordinarily complicated.

Hanoi and Bucharest both viewed the Soviet control of material assistance as a trap. The Romanians, in particular, saw Moscow’s persistent stress on central coordination as proof of an impending *fait accompli* that would restrict Hanoi’s policy independence as well as its own. During their November meeting, Ceausescu informed Trinh of the 19-22 October discussions in Moscow and linked them with the tendencies that emerged at the Albanian Workers Party Congress (1-8 November) and the Bulgarian Party Congress (15-19 November).²¹⁰ The writing on the wall foretold of very worrisome developments if Hanoi did not seize the diplomatic initiative, including accepting the possibility of negotiations, in the near future. According to Ceausescu:

The proceedings of those two congresses – the Albanian and the Bulgarian – strengthened the opinions that we expressed to you after the Moscow conference. At Moscow there was an observable preoccupation to reach what is currently called a “political” solution to resolve the war situation in Vietnam as quickly as possible, and it emerged that this issue was discussed in the meeting between Gromyko, Johnson

²⁰⁹ Ibid, pp. 8-9.

²¹⁰ Neither the Romanian report on the Moscow meeting nor the briefing on that meeting that Bucharest sent to Hanoi, nor the reports on the Albanian and Bulgarian congresses have surfaced as yet.

and Dean Rusk.²¹¹ In the meantime we have received, directly and indirectly, a series of reports from different sources confirming this and indicating that, to a certain degree at least, an understanding regarding this problem has already been realized. [\[Document 38\]](#)

Bodnaras suggested that an agreement on imposing negotiations upon Hanoi had in fact already been reached “between the Soviets and the Americans and between the Soviets and others.” Ceausescu conveyed his impression that the existence of such an accord was demonstrated “in the manner in which the Vietnamese problem was raised” at the Bulgarian Congress:

I would like to underscore the fact that the requests for achieving a coordination of assistance for Vietnam, at least among the socialist countries of Europe, which at first glance seem to have the aim of intensifying this assistance, from the manner in which the problem was raised especially in Moscow it emerged that the aim of this coordination would not have been entirely that, because almost all who spoke in Moscow – all of the delegations from Europe, in fact, the party leaders – expressed a certain doubt about the necessity for such a large volume of assistance and that in any case they were not certain if that assistance was reaching Vietnam or if it was used by the Vietnamese. Of course, one must always look to the meaning behind the words, and our impression was that in this direction there could be certain intentions to further restrict this assistance under certain conditions. [\[Document 38\]](#)

The Romanians shared their “most intimate thoughts” and suspicions with Hanoi, that the rest of the Soviet bloc fully intended “to use this [assistance] to apply a certain pressure upon the leaders of Vietnam” and compel them to modify their policy towards negotiations according to Soviet interests.

These are the impressions with which we were left after the discussions. Moreover, according to the intelligence reports that we have about some of the discussions to which I have referred, it seems that our impressions are not completely lacking in a certain basis. [\[Document 38\]](#)

²¹¹ Ceausescu may have been referring to the Rusk-Gromyko meeting of 6 October, 1966 and Johnson’s efforts to engage Kosygin in the process during the Glassboro meeting. However, despite US desire for such an accord, the Soviets refused. Although the evidence indicates that Moscow did wish to gain more leverage over assistance to Hanoi and did have a pronounced interest in pressing Hanoi into negotiations, it does not suggest that Moscow desired or accepted to do so in condominium with the United States. See e.g. *Memorandum of Conversation*, New York, September 24, 1966, 6:30–11 p.m., Document 247, *Foreign Relations of The United States, 1964–1968 Volume IV, Vietnam, 1966*.

These were hardly Soviet concerns. Nor were they characteristic of the Polish, Hungarian or other “fraternal” allied approaches to Hanoi. The argument that Soviet bloc initiatives were of a nature to limit Vietnamese policy options unless Hanoi took the initiative was unique to Romania among the Soviet bloc members. Hanoi’s inclusion of it in both the January 1967 Plenum resolution and the instruction to the COSVN is perhaps the most striking evidence suggesting Romanian influence on the Vietnamese change of strategy.

A fait accompli by the other Soviet bloc members could be avoided and Hanoi’s policy independence assured, Bucharest argued, if the DRV leadership grasped the initiative and launched their own peace effort, including the possibility of negotiations on their own terms. The Romanians held that Soviet-sponsored attempts to create a supranational entity for assisting Vietnam were ill advised. To begin with, it was simply unworkable given the existing disunity. As Maurer put it, “unity cannot be realized on an organizational basis because there are a multitude of obstacles that are very difficult to surmount.” [Document 38]

It was also inherently divisive and bound to formalize the schism given the Soviet-led effort to exclude Beijing. Most importantly for Hanoi, it would compel Vietnam to modify its policy since its current need to maintain working relations with China prohibited its participation. Most importantly for Bucharest, it closely resembled previous Soviet moves to further subordinate the foreign and security policies of allied and client states to Moscow’s will, which struck at the independence of all the smaller socialist states and those within the Warsaw Pact first of all.

Transmitting the Trinh Signal

The Romanian channel has not previously been identified as possible inspiration for the Trinh signal, nor has it been credited with first announcement of that signal. This is somewhat perplexing given that several hours before the Vietnamese Central Committee Plenum adopted its resolution establishing the new policy of accepting the possibility of negotiations, Romania’s president and foreign minister unexpectedly announced to the US ambassador “that they were now giving him the “signal” which the Americans had long awaited from Hanoi.”²¹² The intention to formally adopt this step had apparently been signaled by the DRV to Bucharest in the early hours of 23 January in Hanoi (0200-0300

²¹² Emphasis in original. An excerpt of the ambassador’s report on the discussion is reproduced as “Bucharest 892 to SecState (SECRET-NODIS), 23 January 1967,” in *Pentagon Papers* (1997), Part VI. C. 4, p. 250. For the full report see *Telegram From the Embassy in Romania to the Department of State*, Bucharest, January 23, 1967, 1500Z, Document 154 in *FRUS*, 1964–1968 Volume XVII, *Eastern Europe*.

hours). Given the four hour time difference, the message was received “around 10 pm” the evening before in Romania (on 22 January). Shortly thereafter, just as he was retiring following a diplomatic hunting party hosted by the Romanians, US Ambassador Richard Davis was roused out of his train cabin for an unexpected private audience with Romanian President Chivu Stoica and Foreign Minister Corneliu Manescu.

Remarkably, the *Pentagon Papers* make no connection between Bucharest’s announcement of this “signal” and the subsequent Trinh signal announced five days later. Instead, the Pentagon analysts presented the incident as a show without substance and yet further reason to doubt Romania’s credibility as intermediary.²¹³ The Secretary of State, however, treated the Romanian signal quite seriously.²¹⁴

Rusk responded immediately with a series of questions seeking clarification on 25 January, which in turn sparked a series of interviews, reports and responses over the next week.²¹⁵ Given that the initial Romanian signal provoked several rounds of telegrams between the embassy in Bucharest and the State Department and three meetings with senior Romanian officials (the foreign minister, president, and party general secretary) within a week, the dismissive conclusion of the Pentagon seems unwarranted.²¹⁶ Especially since the broadcast of the Trinh signal over Radio Hanoi on 28 January confirmed the signal first transmitted by Bucharest almost a week before and reaffirmed by the Romanian Foreign Minister that very day.²¹⁷

The excerpts of these communications reproduced in the *Pentagon Papers* avoid any reference to the Trinh signal. Aside from Ambassador Davis’ original report of 23 January, 1967, none of them have been found in the State Department’s records.²¹⁸ The Romanian

²¹³ *Pentagon Papers* (1997), Part VI. C. 4, p. 252. According to the Pentagon analyst summarizing the Romanian channel: “At one time, they were claiming they had received the “signal” from Hanoi in response to Goldberg’s UN speech in the fall of 1966. (Goldberg had stated that Hanoi only needed to give “an indication as to “what Hanoi would do in response to a cessation of bombing by the US”) Later, they admitted that they had received no specific “signal.” Ibid, p. 5.

²¹⁴ Unfortunately, the reproduction of Rusk’s response in the *Pentagon Papers* (STATE 125269 to AmEmbassy Bucharest (SECRET-NODIS), 25 January 1967) begins only at point “3.” And does not include Rusk’s evaluation of the channel. However, it does note Rusk’s request that Romania contact Hanoi.

²¹⁵ Five reports (January 23, 25, 28, 31 and February 1) are excerpted in *Pentagon Papers* (1997), Part VI. C. 4, pp. 250-254.

²¹⁶ After the January 23 and 25 messages, Davis reported his follow-up meeting with Manescu in BUCHAREST 913 to SecState (SECRET-NODIS), 28 January 1967; his meeting with Macovescu and Ceausescu in BUCHAREST 925 to SecState (SECRET-NODIS), 31 January 1967; and a further report in BUCHAREST 932 to SecState (SECRET-NODIS), 1 February 1967. In all of these cases, less than half of the original message is reproduced in the *Pentagon Papers*.

²¹⁷ BUCHAREST 913 to SecState (SECRET-NODIS), 28 January 1967 in *Pentagon Papers* (1997), Part VI. C. 4, p. 253.

²¹⁸ As note #6 to Davis’ 23 January report informs us, although “no response was found” in the State Department records to Davis’ query as to whether he should seek to clarify the message with Ceausescu, “Davis

transcript of the 31 January meeting between the US Ambassador and Ceausescu appended below strongly suggests that the “signal” transmitted by Bucharest did in fact refer to the Trinh signal. [[Document 41](#)]

This first Trinh signal is rightly considered a major benchmark in movement towards the end of the Vietnam conflict.²¹⁹ According to one authority, “most analysts, both then and later, considered Trinh’s interview a milestone in the evolution of Hanoi’s attitude toward negotiations.”²²⁰ Indeed, as Pham Van Dong later confirmed to the Prime Minister Maurer eight months later, the January decision “marked a turning point in our diplomatic position.”²²¹

The *Pentagon Papers* motivated its airy dismissal of the Romanian report as due the refusal of its president and foreign minister “to be drawn out” when pressed by the American ambassador regarding the identity and position of the source. However, that refusal was motivated not by “lack of substance,” as postulated by Pentagon analysts. Bucharest was laboring under the same restriction that Vietnamese authorities had imposed on Polish diplomat Janusz Lewandowski when the DRV leadership agreed to send a representative to make direct contact with the Americans in Warsaw during *MARIGOLD*.²²² Lewandowski was required to shoulder the burden of that responsibility personally, with no explicitly acknowledged authority from either Hanoi or Pham Van Dong. If news of the effort leaked, then Hanoi could and would deny there had ever been anything to it and the only reputations to suffer would be those of Lewandowski and Poland.

In essence, Pentagon analysts derided Bucharest for maintaining the confidentiality that was a prerequisite for successful intermediation. Given that Secretary of State Rusk explicitly requested the Romanians to pass along any signal that Hanoi might care to send back in October 1965, that the US again prodded them for “any indication” from Hanoi in October 1966, and that Bucharest had never “cried wolf” before, demands from the post in Bucharest and the State Department that they now “prove” the authority of the signal evidently caught them unprepared.

met with Ceausescu on February 3.” But the 3 February meeting covered only bilateral relations and Vietnam is mentioned only once, by Davis, as “a sort of hindrance.” *Airgram From the Embassy in Romania to the Department of State*, Bucharest, February 3, 1967, Document 155 in FRUS, 1964–1968 Volume XVII, Eastern Europe.

²¹⁹ The second Trinh signal came in December 1967, when Hanoi shifted from merely accepting the possibility of negotiations if the US ceased bombing to committing itself to them if the bombing ceased.

²²⁰ Hershberg (2012), 539.

²²¹ *Transcript of Conversations Between Romanian Communist Party Delegation and Vietnamese Delegation*, Hanoi, September 29-30, 1967, ANR, Fond C.C. al P.C.R., Secția Relații Externe, dosar 82/1967, f. 47.

²²² Hershberg (2000), p. 23.

The Romanian report of that conversation has yet to surface. However, the US report partly reproduced in the *Pentagon Papers* suggests that Romanian Foreign Minister Corneliu Manescu first avoided the question and then all but admitted that there was no specific basis for claiming any signal existed.²²³ Manescu may have been flustered by Ambassador Davis' insistence on the source of the signal given reasonable presumption that the transmission of such a message in accordance with Washington's repeated request would not evoke such expressions of doubt. Indeed, the skepticism of the US ambassador was such that even after Trinh went public in his 28 January interview with Australian journalist Wilfred Burchett, Davis continued to treat the Romanian report as having no particular basis.²²⁴

Why then did the Romanians bother? Clearly, Bucharest was driven by its own interest in achieving a peaceful solution to the conflict as quickly as possible. But it was also fulfilling a pledge to a great power with which it wanted to cultivate exceptional relations. Bucharest forwarded the signal because of the repeated expressions of US interest in "just about any signal" from Hanoi, first from Secretary Rusk in 1965 and then from Ambassador Goldberg a year later, and because a prior report of it would (ordinarily) serve to confirm its seriousness.²²⁵

To this end Bucharest counseled Hanoi to announce the change in policy through both private and public channels in order to diminish the chance that it might be lost or severely distorted. [Documents 30, 38] According to Pentagon analysts, when the Romanians briefed Goldberg on their October talks in Hanoi and asserted that a "US bombing cessation was necessary to create a 'better climate' for negotiations," the American responded "that Hanoi only needed to give 'an indication as to what [it] would do in response to a prior cessation of bombing by the US.'"²²⁶ Although his formulation suggested an "encouraging indication" was the only requirement for an end to the bombing, Goldberg artfully dodged requests to further define that "indication" with the argument that Washington did not want to be accused of "placing conditions:"

"We would welcome from Hanoi through your good offices – if that is their desire as it is ours – or, if not, through any other channel of their choosing, an indication as to

²²³ *Pentagon Papers* (1997), Part VI. C. 4, p. 250.

²²⁴ *Ibid*, pp. 253-254.

²²⁵ According to the note of that conversation: "If Rumania should pick up a signal [Rusk] would only ask Mr. Manescu to make sure that the signal was not blocked." *Memorandum of Conversation*, Washington, October 14, 1965, 8 p.m., Document 168, *Foreign Relations of the United States 1964-1968*, Volume III, *Vietnam, June-December 1965*.

²²⁶ *Pentagon Papers* (1997), Part VI. C. 4., p. 248.

what North Vietnam would do in response to a prior cessation of bombing by the US.” Goldberg then repeated this statement. Manescu then inquired what Goldberg considered new in this statement compared to past positions. Goldberg said words chosen carefully, that he did not want to assert anything was new but that the presumed most important word is ‘indication.’²²⁷

Sidestepping the Romanian foreign minister’s direct question as to whether the United States was “ready to cease bombing in return for an indication,” Goldberg ambiguously replied:

We merely say we [are] willing [to] consider suspending bombing if we receive encouraging indication. Of course, if nothing is going to follow, and the war is continued by North Vietnam as now, US will not suspend bombing.²²⁸

Still seeking clarification, Manescu asked whether he would be correct in reporting back to Bucharest that the US “would consider” a bombing cessation “on the basis of an indication by North Vietnam.” Goldberg, however, insisted that he could “not define it further” beyond the fact that the indication “would have to demonstrate a desire to move toward peaceful settlement.”²²⁹ That same day, acting Secretary of State Nicholas Katzenbach asserted almost exactly the opposite, that the US government “had to know in specific terms, publicly or privately, what response would be forthcoming” beforehand.²³⁰ Shortly after the Romanians delivered the signal in the evening of 22 January (the early hours of 23 January in Hanoi), Secretary Rusk made it crystal clear that the US administration actually required military reciprocity and not just “some signal” for a bombing halt.²³¹ Recapping his 22 January discussion with Manescu and Stoica, Ambassador Davis delivered the Rusk line to Ceausescu on 31 January, 1967:

Minister Manescu said that, in connection with the necessity of ceasing the bombing of North Vietnam, the USA always asks for a signal that shows what will happen after

²²⁷ USUN New York 1777 to SecState (Secret-NODIS), 22 October 1966, *Pentagon Papers*, (1997) Part VI. C. 4., p. 248.

²²⁸ Ibid.

²²⁹ Ibid.

²³⁰ STATE 71460 to AmEmbassy Manila, Manila TOSEC 52, 22 October 1966 in *Pentagon Papers* (1997), Part VI. C. 4., p. 249.

²³¹ Rusk’s instructions to Davis on 25 January were to make “clear to the Romanians that the United States could in no event stop the bombing in return for mere agreement to talk,” and that acceptable reciprocity included “infiltration and reduction of incidents in South Vietnam.” *Pentagon Papers* (1997), Part VI. C. 4, p. 251. See also “Telegram From the Department of State to the Embassy in the Soviet Union,” Washington, January 31, 1967, 5:16 p.m., Document 32 in *FRUS, 1964-1968, Volume V, Vietnam, 1967*.

that. He explained that the cessation of bombing could lead to negotiations in view of achieving a peaceful settlement and, in fact, that such a signal was already given. Here I must mention two essential points. *The United States of America can in no case stop the bombing in exchange for a simple agreement to engage in talks. The reciprocal response that we await on the part of Hanoi must be concrete and must contain, in some form, the promise of real steps for the beginning of a process in the direction of de-escalation.*²³² [[Document 41](#)]

The transcript of Davies' meeting with Ceausescu on 31 January clearly links the "signal" announced by the Romanians in the evening of 22 January with the "Trinh signal."²³³ Throughout, Ceausescu stressed that a bombing halt "without any condition" was the best way "for achieving, through well-thought actions on the part of the United States of America, a solution that would be acceptable both for the USA and for Vietnam." When Davis insisted on the US need for "some assurance" of reciprocity, Ceausescu replied that he could not obtain the "assurances that the USA desires," but that he could "say that the cessation of bombing will clear the path toward negotiations." [[Document 41](#)]

The Romanian leader wondered aloud why the Americans seemed unable to see the benefit of taking this step, even apart from ending the sacrifice of blood and treasure:

What blocks you from ceasing the bombing so that you can meet? You have a very well developed diplomacy. You can find diplomatic modalities of such a nature so that this measure, taken on US initiative, will strengthen the authority of the United States of America and win you more friends. [[Document 41](#)]

Ceausescu further informed Davis that the Democratic Republic of Vietnam wanted "to have as few intermediaries as possible and to discuss as directly as possible." Although often accused of interposing himself as a mediator, Ceausescu underscored that Hanoi was "right not to accept" intermediaries because they "always complicate matters." It was his experience, Ceausescu continued, that "no matter what you want, it is always difficult to find intermediaries that are quite so disinterested and that do not seek to draw certain uses" from their involvement. [[Document 41](#)]

Secretary Rusk was of the same opinion, instructing the US ambassador to inform the Romanians "that we want to have direct and discrete contact with Hanoi" and asking them to

²³² Emphasis mine.

²³³ Davis stated that his request for the audience was motivated by "the conversation I had on 22 January with the President of the State Council, Chivu Stoica, and with Foreign Minister Manescu, on the train, after the hunting trip organized for the heads of diplomatic missions accredited in Bucharest."

transmit this to the Vietnamese. Ceausescu agreed to do so. Contrary to the received wisdom, however, he stipulated that Romania would do so not as an intermediary of either but because of its good relations with both:

Regarding the request to transmit the desire of the USA to the Democratic Republic of Vietnam, we do not wish to give the impression in any way that we want to become intermediaries between the USA and Vietnam. However, taking into account our relations that we consider good with the USA, and the relations that we have with the D. R. Vietnam, we will transmit this to them. [[Document 41](#)]

While hints of a looming change in Vietnamese strategy and policy had been circulating since the beginning of the month, the Romanian channel was apparently the first to transmit this signal to US representatives. Why the State Department chose to acknowledge the transmission of the signal from Moscow on 27 January while ignoring the content and import of the same signal from Bucharest on 22/23 January is still to be explained.²³⁴ However, Washington's treatment of both messages was very much in line with its response to the signal given by Trinh in his 28 January interview broadcast over Radio Hanoi the same day. Attempting to belay increasing public pressure for ceasing the air campaign and engaging in negotiations, the Johnson administration dismissed Hanoi's policy shift with a dizzying array of metaphors ranging from "marshmallows" and "baseballs," and "rabbits" and "horses," to "slamming doors" in order to portray the Trinh signal as the "wrong" one.²³⁵

Persuading the Americans

Archival evidence suggests that Hanoi did consider Romanian arguments for accepting negotiations in principle and in fact. But did Bucharest have any success during 1965-1966 in persuading Washington that a military solution was illusory and that engagement in the negotiation process was the only viable option? Identifying a specific Romanian impact on US thinking is impossible absent the discovery of a clear indication by US officials. The policymaking process in the United States is simply too complex to allow the singling out of a specific external input in any policy shift.

²³⁴ See Documents 29 ("Editorial Note") and 32 ("Telegram From the Department of State to the Embassy in the Soviet Union") in *FRUS*, Volume V, Vietnam, 1967. Hints appearing in early January suggested an imminent policy shift.

²³⁵ See e.g. Hershberg (2012), pp. 539.

Tracing causality in this instance is even more difficult in that many of America's friends were quietly (and not so quietly) advising fundamental policy reconsideration along similar lines. And more than a few members of the administration were expressing similar thoughts to Johnson privately, even while carrying out and defending publicly the policies in which they had no faith. Under Secretary of State George W. Ball led perhaps the most heroic battle in this regard, laying bare fallacies in administration thinking regarding the war in internal written memos and official meetings since 1961, years before any third parties became involved in the search for a negotiated end to the war.²³⁶ Ball's predecessor as Under Secretary, Chester Bowles, had done the same, and even Vice-President Hubert Humphrey added his voice to this dissent.²³⁷

Secrecy and over-compartmentalization further encumber identification of any causal links between Romanian advice and US thinking. As a former member of the Harriman "negotiations team" observed, the circle of those informed regarding any "particular effort tended to be confined to no more than a score of people at State, Defense, and the White House," such that "the peace hunters and the warriors were reading different texts."²³⁸ In a February 1968 "brief recapitulation" of administration efforts over the past several years, Averell Harriman listed by name the Polish (MARIGOLD), Soviet (SUNFLOWER) and French (PENNSYLVANIA) channels, and mentioned the efforts of the UN Secretary General and the Canadians, and contacts involving Italians, Swedes, Indonesians, Burmese, Japanese and others. The Romanian channel, however, was described as that of an unnamed "foreign state."²³⁹

In March 1968 Harriman cautioned President Johnson that since rumors of Bucharest's involvement were already circulating and the secret "may gradually leak out," contingencies "should be prepared for the time when it might become necessary to acknowledge our effort through the Romanians."²⁴⁰ Harriman likewise warned his Romanian

²³⁶ The *Pentagon Papers* reproduces lengthy excerpts of Ball's memoranda to President Johnson, notably "How Valid Are The Assumptions Underlying Our Vietnam Policy," October 6, 1964, and "A Compromise Solution in South Vietnam," July 1, 1965. See also George W. Ball, *The Past Has Another Pattern*, New York, W. W. Norton and Company, 1982; and David L. DiLeo, *George Ball, Vietnam, And The Rethinking Of Containment*, Chapel Hill, University of North Carolina Press, 1991.

²³⁷ Chester Bowles, *Promises to Keep*, New York, Harper and Row, 1971, pp. 407-16, 486, 575-6; Hubert H. Humphrey, *The Education of a Public Man*, New York, Doubleday, 1976, p. 320-24.

²³⁸ Cooper (2005), p. 245.

²³⁹ W. A. H., "Our Efforts To Seek A Peaceful Settlement Of The Vietnam Conflict," February 20, 1968, in Special Files, Public Service, JFK-LBJ, Chronological Files, February 1968, Box 571, Folder 2, Harriman Papers, Manuscript Division, US Library of Congress (hereafter: LOC). Harriman engaged in a bit of subterfuge by including Romania in the larger list of contacts while concealing it as a major channel.

²⁴⁰ "Romanian Approach to Hanoi on US Behalf," March 2, 1968, p. 2, and "Memorandum of Conversation," March 2, 1968, p. 10, Chronological File, March, 1968, Box 571, Folder 3, Harriman Papers, LOC.

interlocutors that the cat was out of the bag and that the American public would (and probably should) be informed:

Stories so far have come from New York, not Washington. The Russians know about it. We have reason to believe that Hanoi is frank with the French. ... At some time the release of the story may become desirable to both of us. Your role can only gain respect.²⁴¹

Bucharest's response was very much the opposite of what persistent Soviet bloc disinformation would later portray it. There was no interest in glory grabbing. Instead, the Romanian representative explained that: "we are desirous, and it is also in your best interest that the secret should be kept. ... We have no other interest except a desire to see the war end. We desire no publicity for our effort."²⁴²

In fact, secrecy continued to be preserved because the Romanian channel was not shut down, as often mistakenly asserted, in mid-February 1968 (when Rusk commented that "he thought that we should close out this channel, thanking the government.")²⁴³ US-Romanian and (Romanian-Vietnamese) consultations continued through year's end.²⁴⁴ President Nixon then requested the reopening of the channel in the midst of another detailed discussion on Vietnam (and China) during his 1969 visit to Romania, and consultations with Washington continued with similar discretion until at least 1972.²⁴⁵

By far the largest barrier to identifying any causal link is the fact that President Johnson, Secretary of State Dean Rusk, National Security Adviser Walter Rostow, Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara (at least until the end of 1965) and, especially, the Joint Chiefs of Staff, dismissed or ignored assessments that challenged and debunked the central tenets of

²⁴¹ "Memorandum of Conversation," March 2, 1968, pp. 10-11 in *Ibid*.

²⁴² *Ibid*

²⁴³ *Memorandum of Conversation*, Washington, February 12, 1968, Document 71 in *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1964-1968*, Volume VI, *Vietnam, January-August 1968*.

²⁴⁴ For example, Dean Rusk's discussions with the Romanian deputy prime minister on 9 July, 1968, with the Romanian foreign minister on 1 October, 1968, and with the Romanian ambassador in Washington on 12 December, 1968, all of which contain sections dedicated to Vietnam. Unfortunately, none of the sections "dealing with Vietnam" have been published as of this writing although footnotes referencing them in Documents 162, 170 and 174 in *FRUS, 1964-1968*, Volume XVII, *Eastern Europe*, note that they are in the Johnson Library, National Security File, Country File, Romania, Cables, Vol. 3 (Document 162) and the Department of State, Central Files, POL 27 VIET S (Documents 170 and 174).

²⁴⁵ For the Nixon-Kissinger discussions on Vietnam with Ceausescu and Maurer in 1969 see *Memorandum of Conversation*, Bucharest, August 3, 1969, Document 184 in *FRUS, 1969-1976*, Volume XXIX, *Eastern Europe; Eastern Mediterranean, 1969-1972*. See also Document 183, *Ibid*. Secretary of State Rogers also described his July 1972 two-hour discussion with Ceausescu on Vietnam as of "considerable significance." *Telegram From Secretary of State Rogers to President Nixon*, Belgrade, July 7, 1972, 1755Z, Document 213 in *FRUS, 1969-1972*, Volume XXIX. The contents of that discussion remain unpublished as well.

the administration's chosen policy, even from their own subordinate institutions.²⁴⁶ The State Department's Intelligence and Research Bureau (INR) diligently addressed the fallacies behind those assumptions throughout the 1960s.²⁴⁷ The Central Intelligence Agency also sounded clear warning, although that message was sometimes muted by the countervailing opinions held by the CIA director during 1961-1966, occasionally resulting in rather sharp INR-CIA differences.²⁴⁸

By 1966, however, even the Office of the Secretary of Defense – although *not* the Joint Chiefs of Staff (JCS) or the military intelligence services – conducted studies whose conclusions underscored the error in US assumptions and were consonant with those of the INR and the CIA as well as with Romanian advice.²⁴⁹ However, neither the civilian leadership - Johnson, Rostow and Rusk – nor the military leadership – the JCS and the Military Assistance Command in Vietnam (MACV) – would allow their cognitive biases to be challenged. According to a former CIA analyst, agency assessments had “little impact” on the policy pursued by Johnson and his principal counselors because they “were not what these decisionmakers wanted to hear at the time.”²⁵⁰ Likewise, US strategic intelligence, one

²⁴⁶ See e.g. *Intelligence and Vietnam: The Top Secret 1969 State Department Study* (2004), <http://nsarchive.gwu.edu/NSAEBB/NSAEBB121/>; and Harold P. Ford, *CIA and the Vietnam Policymakers: Three Episodes 1962 – 1968*, Washington, D.C.: Center for the Study of Intelligence, US Central Intelligence Agency, 1998, Episode 2, <https://www.cia.gov/library/center-for-the-study-of-intelligence/csi-publications/books-and-monographs/cia-and-the-vietnam-policymakers-three-episodes-1962-1968/epis2.html>. See also Thomas A. Reinstein, “The Way A Drunk Uses A Lamp Post: Intelligence and the Bombing of North Vietnam,” paper presented at 20th Annual James A. Barnes Graduate Conference, Temple University, Philadelphia, PA, March 27-28, 2015.

²⁴⁷ See e.g. *Intelligence and Vietnam: The Top Secret 1969 State Department Study*, George Washington University, May 2, 2004, National Security Archive Electronic Briefing Book No. 121, <http://nsarchive.gwu.edu/NSAEBB/NSAEBB121/>; Thomas L. Hughes, “INR’S Vietnam Study in Context: A Retrospective Preface Thirty-five Years Later,” in *Ibid.* See also

²⁴⁸ Ford, *CIA and the Vietnam Policymakers: Three Episodes 1962 – 1968*, (1998), <https://www.cia.gov/library/center-for-the-study-of-intelligence/csi-publications/books-and-monographs/cia-and-the-vietnam-policymakers-three-episodes-1962-1968/epis2.html>. See, e.g., the INR’s 8-page footnote dissent to *Special National Intelligence Estimate 10-11-65: Estimative Products on Vietnam*, September 22, 1965, pp. 10-18. See also *Memorandum Prepared in the Central Intelligence Agency*, “Comments on the Secretary of Defense’s 26 June 1965 Memorandum, *Program of Expanded Military and Political Moves with Respect to Vietnam*,” June 30, 1965, Document 34 and *Special Intelligence Supplement: An Appraisal of the Bombing of North Vietnam*, December 21, 1965, Document 239, in *FRUS, 1964-1968*, Vol. III, *Vietnam July-December 1965*.

²⁴⁹ See e.g. the Institute for Defense Analysis’ JASON Division, IDA TS/HQ66-49, *The Effects of US Bombing on North Vietnam’s Ability to Support Military Operations in South Vietnam and Laos: Retrospect and Prospect*, Aug. 29, 1966, excerpted in the *Pentagon Papers*, IV.C.7. (b), “Volume II: The Air War in North Vietnam,” pp. 122-27.

²⁵⁰ Ford, *CIA and the Vietnam Policymakers: Three Episodes 1962 – 1968*, (1998), <https://www.cia.gov/library/center-for-the-study-of-intelligence/csi-publications/books-and-monographs/cia-and-the-vietnam-policymakers-three-episodes-1962-1968/epis2.html>.

military historian wrote, was “consistently and remarkably accurate, but senior military leaders seldom, if ever, believed or acted upon it.”²⁵¹

The fact that Rusk and Rostow were regularly (sometimes directly) informed of Romanian evaluations is therefore no guarantee that those evaluations had any impact on US policy. On the other hand, Romanian advice did hold some appeal for Rusk. Repeatedly, the secretary of state and his representatives acknowledged the “frankness and clarity” of Romanian exchanges and solicited Bucharest’s input, despite its very different and essentially adversarial premises. [[Document 23](#)]

The degree to which Romanian argument and advice presented to Washington differed from that of other third party initiatives from within the bloc awaits more rigorous examination. Having said that, one obvious difference was that Romanian advice was driven by a foreign and security policy that depended on the negotiated resolution of conflict. [[Documents 7, 23, 41](#)] The rest of the bloc, in contrast, reflected Soviet (i.e. great power) policy, in which the use or threat of force was at least equally prominent as an acceptable means of conflict resolution.

A second difference was the undiplomatic quality of Romanian arguments. Among the other bloc members the pursuit of negotiations was the domain of diplomats who tended to “make nice,” withdrawing when encountering strong reaction and massaging the facts to enhance the attractiveness of particular initiatives. In Romania, the senior leadership – the party leader, prime minister and first deputy prime minister, especially – were the primary “mediators” (a term from which those authorities ran like the plague). Although the foreign minister and his deputy were used as emissaries Romanian policy regarding mediation in Vietnam was formulated by the RCP Central Committee and all contacts were organized and orchestrated by the RCP CC’s Foreign Relations Section, not by the Foreign Ministry.²⁵² As a result, Romanian interlocutors generally got to the point quickly and rarely pulled their punches, although without engaging in anti-American invective.

Maurer claimed to be giving his “opinion as a man,” rather than as his country’s prime minister, when he bluntly warned the US ambassador in October 1965 that, by bombing the Democratic Republic of Vietnam, the United States had placed itself in the

²⁵¹ Herbert Y. Schandler, “US Military Victory in Vietnam: A Dangerous Illusion?” in Robert S. McNamara, James G. Blight, Robert K. Bingham, Thomas J. Biersteker and Col. Herbert Y. Schandler, *Argument Without End: In Search of Answers To The Vietnam Tragedy*, New York: Public Affairs, 1999, p. 369.

²⁵² Author’s interview with Mircea Raceanu, former head of the North America Department in the Romanian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, February 9, 2012. At times, the ministry department responsible for the United States had “no idea” regarding visits to and messages regarding Vietnam.

position of a rogue state. Not only was it widely perceived as flouting international law and threatening the security of other nations, it was not even serving any identifiable US interest. As he stated to the ambassador, “no rational person who accepts the idea of peaceful coexistence could possibly understand” the US campaign against North Vietnam. “Please understand,” Maurer continued, “you will find yourselves facing ever more tenacious opposition” because there are “hundreds of thousands of people” in the United States alone who “cannot accept such situation” and this, along with global reaction, “constitutes the source of your loss”:

What you are doing in Vietnam is far worse than a serious mistake. It is a wild adventure, something that makes no sense; it is absurd and irrational, more dangerous than any adventure. You are affirming an orientation that pushes us back 2,000 years [destroying] trust in the possibility of peaceful coexistence within a rational framework, and that is more dangerous than anything. [[Document 6](#)]

When the US representative asked for his opinion on Vietnam, Bodnaras emphasized that mutual respect demanded he respond with “full sincerity.” A former military and security chief who once commanded “insurgents” himself, Bodnaras took pains to explain the true nature of the war and real state of mind of the Vietnamese that Washington so egregiously misapprehended:

The Vietnamese people are an ancient people, whose cultural traditions and unitary civilization date over four millennia. The consciousness of the values created and perpetuated through the centuries, the memory of heated battles fought over the entire course of the history of Vietnam for their defense, for the preservation of the national identity are important elements that cannot be overlooked in appreciating the fighting capacity of the Vietnamese people. The historical retrospective shows that, time after time, the Vietnamese fought against foreign invasions and occupations and were the ones who emerged victorious. In the last twenty-some years, they have had to confront French colonialists, then the Japanese and again the French, supported that time by American dollars, and everyone knows how these confrontations concluded. At present, the Vietnamese fight against the Americans while penetrated by the same consciousness of the justice of their cause and of the conviction in their victory. [[Document 23](#)]

“Truly,” Bodnaras pointed out, it was “hard to imagine a more mobilizing cause,” the justice of which was “defined through its very content – the struggle for the independence and sovereignty of the fatherland, against foreign aggression, for the liberty and integrity of

the territory of the country, for removing artificial divisions of a unitary people, [and] for the affirmation of its legitimate right to decide its own destiny, conforming to its will and aspirations.” Unfortunately, the Romanian explained, the United States had taken the wrong side in this struggle, and in the process had transformed it. It was now a war against foreign aggression; only the aggressors were not the North Vietnamese, as Washington insisted:

From the moment when the USA brought an expeditionary corps to South Vietnam, when the American troops entered into direct combat, when it was no longer a situation of a war of the Vietnamese against the Vietnamese but of the Americans against the Vietnamese, from that moment the character of the conflict suffered a fundamental modification, the war gained a qualitatively new content, transforming it into a popular war of the entire Vietnamese people against foreign invaders.

[\[Document 23\]](#)

Ceausescu was even more undiplomatic, not only because he had “little diplomacy” (as he often stated) but because the conflict in Vietnam was “a problem where matters must be stated with the utmost clarity.” “Why the USA finds itself in Vietnam,” Ceausescu observed to his American interlocutor, was “not understood even by all American citizens, not to mention by other governments and other peoples.” There was, he affirmed, “no justification” for US claims that it was acting in “defense of Vietnam against foreign aggression”:

Through the continuation of these acts of war you do nothing other than demonstrate that there can be no trust placed in the foreign policy of the USA, and that those forces taking more rigid positions [against negotiations] should be strengthened.

[\[Document 41\]](#)

At several points during the war President Johnson declared that the United States would “go anywhere, any time” in the pursuit of peace. However, there were in fact quite a few places that Washington (or, for that matter, Moscow) would not or could not go.²⁵³ In contrast, the Romanians really did go “anywhere,” speaking with anyone and everyone involved, in the pursuit of negotiations.

²⁵³ As one administration official warned, “The fact of the matter is that if Hanoi gives a clear “signal” that it is ready to talk we will be placed in a very awkward position if we don’t respond in the light of the President’s statement (most recently re-asserted in a speech by Cy Vance) that we will go “anywhere anytime without preconditions.” *Memorandum From Chester L. Cooper of the National Security Council Staff to the President’s Special Assistant for National Security Affairs (Bundy)*, Washington, October 20, 1965, Document 174 in *FRUS, 1964–1968, Volume III, Vietnam, June–December 1965*.

During 1965-1966 Romania stood with Hanoi and the NLF not only against US military operations in Vietnam but also against Soviet and Chinese attempts to curtail Vietnamese independence. Simultaneously, Romania was pressed by Hanoi and Moscow to mediate Sino-Soviet relations and requested by Washington to assist in promoting US-Vietnamese negotiations (and to provide its “good offices” regarding the Greek-Turkish conflict in Cyprus). And while all of this was occurring the Romanians were mediating Chinese relations with an array of European and developing world countries as well as with the United Nations. The complexity of these efforts would grow exponentially in 1967, when Washington also requested Romanian “good offices” for establishing contacts with the People’s Republic of China and Bucharest became involved in mediating Arab-Israeli relations.²⁵⁴ [See e.g. [Documents 6](#), [14](#), [20](#), [34](#)]

Although some officials in the US administration may not have been particularly pleased by the Romanian approach, they were not kept in the dark about it. Bucharest’s engagement in a five-party negotiation with Washington, Hanoi, Beijing and Moscow made it impossible to pursue any covert agenda or clandestine maneuver to the disadvantage of any one of the parties without immediate exposure. The secret to whatever success Romanian efforts garnered lay in a delicate balance of confidentiality and transparency. The fact that none of Bucharest’s bilateral relations with any of the other four suffered as a result, and that both Washington and Hanoi continued to appeal to its assistance after the Johnson administration had passed from the scene speaks well of Romanian performance.²⁵⁵

²⁵⁴ See e.g. *Memorandum of Conversation*, Washington, June 26, 1967, Document 157 in *FRUS, 1964–1968*, Volume XVII, *Eastern Europe*; Manescu’s more detailed discussion with Rusk on Vietnam on June 23, 1967 is at Department of State, Central Files, POL 27 VIET S. The State Department’s editorial decision to exclude Romanian-American discussions of the Vietnam War occurring within broader conversations during 1966-1968 from its published document collection has caused some confusion among researchers. Munteanu, for instance, cites Document 156 in *FRUS, 1964-1968*, Vol. XVII, *Eastern Europe* as source for his references to the June 23, 1967 Rusk-Maurer discussion of mediation in the Middle East which, he emphasizes, dealt with the Middle East and not Vietnam. (Munteanu (2012), pp. 75-76 and footnote 43.) But Document 156 mentions neither Vietnam nor the Middle East. Although the June 23, 1967 conversation did indeed address the Middle East and Vietnam in detail, memoranda of those discussions remain unpublished. Munteanu’s citations from the Middle East discussion are in fact deposited at Department of State, Central Files, POL 7 ROM. He is also incorrect in concluding that the Romanians discussed negotiation issues only regarding the Middle East. The still unpublished memorandum of the Vietnam discussion from that conversation that Munteanu apparently did not consult is at POL 27 VIET S.

²⁵⁵ For instance, Henry Kissinger noted to a Senior Review Group Meeting in March 1973 that “Romania stuck its neck out for us” and President Nixon placed Bucharest well “ahead” of the other bloc members in foreign policy cooperation. *Minutes of Senior Review Group Meeting*, Washington, March 7, 1973, 3:13-3:44 p.m., Document 3, *Documents on Eastern Europe, 1973-1976*, Volume E-15, *Foreign Relations, 1969-1976*. Making explicit reference to the August 1969 discussions on Vietnam and China, Kissinger declared in 1974 that: “I had the privilege to visit Romania five years ago, when I accompanied President Nixon. We then had one of the most important talks I have ever had in the company of the President, talks with consequences which extended far beyond the scope of our bilateral discussions.” *The Department of State Bulletin*, Vol. LXXI, No. 1848, November 25, 1974, p. 731. For Vietnamese appreciations see e.g. *Transcript of Conversations between*

Bucharest argued both principle and tactical advantage for engaging in negotiations to Hanoi, just as it did to Washington. From the very beginning it clearly stated its position as to the righteousness of the Vietnamese struggle and the lack of justification for US presence and military operations. It did not do so, however, for purposes of political posturing or in order to win propaganda points against the United States. In fact, although Romanian non-military assistance to Vietnam in 1966 and 1967 was the greatest per capita within the Soviet bloc, it did not join in the rabidly anti-American frenzy characteristic of the other participants in “Soviet peace policy.”²⁵⁶

Romania was equally open with Hanoi about its commitment to good relations with the United States. As Maurer recounted in October 1966, his country began improving relations with the US some years earlier, eventually concluding economic and cultural accords. Although those relations had taken a hit with the US aggression in Vietnam, Romania did “not consider breaking” them off. Instead, Maurer said, we concluded “that we must clearly express our disaccord and, more than that, condemn their attitude in the Vietnam problem.” According to the prime minister, “we believe that we must preserve these relations” also in order to present to the Americans “what are, in our opinion, the possibilities for exiting from the current situation.”

We have insisted on frankly expressing our attitude towards this aggression and we have never lost an occasion to tell them our opinion in a civilized, polite manner, but firmly. Personally I have had two such discussions. The first was with Ambassador Crawford on the occasion of his definitive departure from our country when he visited me to say his farewells. I explained to the ambassador, who is a very intelligent man, our position and that which we believe is necessary to be done to resolve the conflict. I demonstrated to the Americans that it is necessary for them to get out of Vietnam.

It is evident that our demonstration did not convince the Americans. However, these things were said in a very categorical manner. I have also had another discussion of this type, after which there were indications that our observations were signaled to the US Department of State, because we received a message on behalf of

Comrade Nicolae Ceausescu and Le Duan, First Secretary of the Central Committee of the Vietnamese Workers Party, Bucharest, November 14-15, 17, 1975, at ANR, Fond C.C. al P.C.R., Secția Relații Externe, dosar 211/1975, file 1-50.

²⁵⁶ Washington took note of this even-handedness. While President Johnson “regretted” that their perceptions diverged over Vietnam, “he appreciated the reasonable position of Romania.” *Memorandum of Conversation*, June 26, 1967, Document 157 in *FRUS, 1964-1968, Volume XVII, Eastern Europe*. During the search for a location for the peace talks, William Bundy described Romania’s record as “fair and impartial” and its anti-US protests “fairly muted.” *Memorandum From the Assistant Secretary of State for East Asian and Pacific Affairs (Bundy) to Secretary of State Rusk*, Washington, April 22, 1968, Document 203 in *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1964-1968, Volume VI, Vietnam, January-August 1968*.

Dean Rusk, in which he said things of which you are aware, because we informed you at that time.²⁵⁷ [[Document 30](#)]

Unwanted Truths

Maurer considered that there were three major errors in US assessments. The first was that of “continually underestimating” Vietnamese military capacity, morale and will to resist. The “second major error committed by the Americans” was their mistaken calculation “that they could count on the nonintervention or the very limited solidarity of the socialist countries.” And “the third major error is that of believing that they can resolve this problem militarily.” [[Document 30](#)]

These errors were fostered by two underlying and closely-related obstacles: Washington’s failure to recognize the essentially “aggressive character of the American military actions in Vietnam,” assuming instead the role of aggrieved party (or, at least, the sponsor of the aggrieved party); and its misidentification of the Vietnamese people’s war for independence and unification as a conventional attack of one state against another. As Maurer explained, his country sought to persuade Washington as to the error of its ways, and to mobilize US allies and American-friendly neutrals to do so as well, based on what it believed to be more accurate analysis:

We have underscored the specific character of this war that the USA must face. While recognizing the superiority of the military power of the United States, we underscored at the same time the impossibility in which the USA finds itself, unable to terminate this conflict through military means. We have affirmed that in the end the Americans will be definitively stuck in this action and they will be defeated. [[Document 30](#)]

This was indeed the line Romania took with the other socialist states, neutral states and US allies, encouraging them all to approach the United States until the right combination of message and messenger pierced the wall of American denial and allowed in some light: [[Documents 16, 22, 24, 36, 39, 40](#)]

Underscoring this series of errors, we have told our different interlocutors that it is necessary for all countries interested in peace to do everything possible in order to convince those in whose hands now rests the resolution of the problem, to do what is

²⁵⁷ Maurer is referring to his exchange with Crawford on October 3, 1965 and to the Manescu-Rusk exchanges of October 14, 1965, May 10, 1966 and October 5, 1966. See e.g. Documents 6, 18-19, 33-34.

necessary so that this conflict ends, that is, to advise the Americans to reconsider the problem. Doing this, we have insisted especially on the interest of the small countries in attaching themselves to this action, because the small countries are the ones that will pay for the broken eggs. [[Document 30](#)]

As the Romanians went round and round with US authorities over the nature of the war they were also addressing each of the underlying assumptions upon which Washington was basing its policy in part. They did so, for example, by explaining that the high morale and strong will to resist despite US bombing derived from the justice of the Vietnamese cause *and* complete faith in a leadership that defeated the French and Japanese in decades of warfare. A leadership that had also proven itself in the short period of reconstruction prior to the current war and continued to do so through its judicious management of resources and policy. [[Documents 23, 41](#)]

Bucharest explicitly juxtaposed the competence and responsibility of the rather impressive leadership in Hanoi to the hollowness and absurd levels of incompetence, incoherence and instability displayed by Saigon. While the regime in the North was both solid and wildly popular, the regime in the South remained a mere façade despised by the majority of the population, and on the verge of collapse. As Bodnarus noted in May:

The head of the Saigon government is nothing other than a docile puppet whose existence and maintenance in power is due exclusively to the support of American dollars and bayonets. He is hated and rejected by his own people ... Buddhists, Catholics, the intellectuals, the students – practically the entire population of South Vietnam is engaged in one form or another in the struggle against the puppet regime and the American occupation. The weakness and the lack of realism of the political formula supported by the USA in South Vietnam is evident and there are numerous indications that the process of political disaggregation, once began, will quickly accentuate and accelerate.

[[Document 23](#)]

Hanoi, in contrast, demonstrated its seriousness, realism and foresight by planning for virtually all of the various stages of escalation that the United States seemingly adopted as the result of unforeseeable circumstance. As to the deputy prime minister informed his American interlocutor in May 1966:

[The Vietnamese] are prepared to take on the problems that will arise in the eventuality of passage to new phases of “escalation” – the bombing of the cities of

Hanoi and Haiphong, or the land invasion of the north. Nor would the eventual US expansion of the war over the countries neighboring Vietnam present a surprise, even though – and this fact must be stressed – the Vietnamese leadership does not desire to internationalize the conflict and strives to maintain the war to its current limits. In the same order of ideas, the leadership of the D. R. Vietnam does not intend to appeal for the sending of volunteers from the friendly countries, because it has in fact sufficient volunteers in the country – the entire Vietnamese people. [[Document 23](#)]

Bodnaras emphasized that the “domino theory” was completely off-track and insisted that it was an error of the first degree “to consider that the policy of the D. R. Vietnam and those who formulate it are tributaries of an external influence.” By the same token, he argued:

The National Liberation Front does not represent an extension in the south of the authority of the North Vietnamese, it constitutes the central forum of a large coalition of political forces and groups in South Vietnam, which conducts the armed struggle against the American military occupation, for the liberation and independence of their country. Within this coalition, with its broad mass patriotic character it is known that the communists represent only a small part, which makes the reticence of the American government to enter into direct contact with the NLF leadership even less explicable. [[Document 23](#)]

Of course, the issues of the nature of the war, validity of the domino theory and recognition of the NLF as the most popular and most significant political force in South Vietnam were tightly bound up in the cognitive bias that motivated US intervention and operations in Vietnam in the first place. Until the Johnson administration decided to reconsider US involvement in Vietnam, Romanian arguments along these lines were bound to fall on deaf ears. Romania was hardly alone. As one authority observed, “no US government agency could admit at that time that the DRV and NLF might be separate entities, since much of the US justification for its war rested on the contention that it was defending South Vietnam against an invasion from North Vietnam.”²⁵⁸

There was in fact a strong resonance between Romanian arguments and concurrent (and earlier) US intelligence assessments and privately voiced dissent within the administration.²⁵⁹ As Under Secretary Ball put it in 1964, while “Hanoi has a government

²⁵⁸ John Prados, “The Mouse That Roared: State Department Intelligence in the Vietnam War,” in “Intelligence and Vietnam: The Top Secret 1969 State Department Study,” National Security Archive Electronic Briefing Book No. 121, May 2, 2004, <http://nsarchive.gwu.edu/NSAEBB/NSAEBB121/>.

²⁵⁹ *Memorandum for the Record sent to the DCI*, “Comment on the Vietnam War Games, SIGMA I-64, 6-9 April 1964,” April 16, 1964, quoted in Harold P. Ford, “The US Decision to Go Big in Vietnam,” *Studies in*

and a purpose and a discipline,” the so-called “‘government’ in Saigon is a travesty.”²⁶⁰ An April 1965 memorandum for the CIA director described US policy as “progressively divorced from reality in Vietnam” and “proceeding with far more courage than wisdom – toward unknown ends.” The authors of the memorandum underscored “the sobering fact that – despite the rising DRV ingredient – the VC insurrection remains essentially an indigenous phenomenon, the product of GVN fecklessness, VC power, and peasant hopelessness,” such that “the chances are considerably better than even that the US will in the end have to disengage in Vietnam, and do so considerably short of our present objectives.”²⁶¹

In July 1965 Under Secretary Ball wrote that American assistance had not yet changed the nature of the civil war in Vietnam but that: “Once we deploy substantial numbers of troops in combat it will become a war between the US and a large part of the population of South Vietnam.” The United States would then “almost certainly” face a “protracted war involving an open-ended commitment of US forces, mounting US casualties, [and] no assurance of a satisfactory solution.”²⁶² Worse yet, the escalatory process would soon take on a life of its own, cost dearly, and still end in failure:

Once large numbers of US troops are committed to direct combat, they will begin to take heavy casualties in a war they are ill-equipped to fight in a non-cooperative if not downright hostile countryside. Once we suffer large casualties, we will have started a well-nigh irreversible process. Our involvement will be so great that we cannot – without national humiliation – stop short of achieving our complete objectives. Of the two possibilities I think humiliation would be more likely than the achievement of our objectives – even after we have paid terrible costs.²⁶³

Following his November-December 1965 fact-finding mission to Southeast Asia, which included discussions in Romania, Mansfield had issued a very similar warning:

The end of the road on the basis of present policy is not in sight either in the sense of a military solution or a solution by negotiations. The Communists give no signs of acquiescing in the basic requirement of our present policy which, in effect, is that

Intelligence, vol. 29, no. 1 (Spring 1985): 7-8. The analyst-authors noted that the war games were loaded with faulty assumptions and “seriously underestimated” the impact of US action on world public opinion.

²⁶⁰ Harold P. Ford, “Why CIA Analysts Were So Doubtful About Vietnam,” vol. 40, no. 5 (1997) *Studies in Intelligence*: 92, <https://www.cia.gov/library/center-for-the-study-of-intelligence/kent-csi/vol40no5/pdf/v40i5a10p.pdf>.

²⁶¹ Memorandum sent to the DCI, “Into the Valley,” 8 April 1965, cited in Ford (1985): 10-11; Ford (1998).

²⁶² George W. Ball, *Memorandum: A Compromise Solution in South Vietnam*, July 1, 1965 as reproduced in *The Pentagon Papers*, Gravel Edition, Volume 4, Boston: Beacon Press, 1971, pp. 615-619.

²⁶³ Ibid. See also DiLeo (1991), pp. 75-76.

North Viet Nam either agree to or be compelled “to leave its neighbors alone”. That concept, in any event, is an oversimplified interpretation of the situation. The bulk of Communist manpower in South Vietnam is still South Vietnamese. South Vietnamese and North Vietnamese are all mixed together, on both sides, in this conflict. The disputants are not only “neighbors,” they are also “relatives”. . . .

This is a conflict in which all the choices open to us are bad choices. We stand to lose in Viet Nam by restraint; but we stand to lose far more at home and throughout the world by the more extensive military pursuit of an elusive objective in Viet Nam.²⁶⁴

Within several months of Bodnaras’ May 1966 briefing to Ambassador Davis on the strength and sources of Vietnamese morale and seemingly inexhaustible capacity for resistance, the CIA, a Pentagon study, and an independent RAND analysis all concluded that administration assessments tended to “overestimate” the impact of US military power and “underestimate the tenacity and recuperative capabilities of the North Vietnamese.”²⁶⁵ As the Pentagon study observed, this tendency reflected “a general failure to appreciate the fact, well-documented in the historical and social science literature, that a direct, frontal attack on a society tends to strengthen the social fabric of the nation, to increase popular support of the existing government, [and] to improve the determination of both the leadership and the populace to fight back.”²⁶⁶

Efforts to expose the “domino theory” as false appear quixotic given that Johnson, Rusk, Rostow and McNamara were all true believers: Rusk articulated it while still Assistant Secretary of State for Far Eastern Affairs in 1951, and McNamara wrote it into US policy in

²⁶⁴ *Memorandum From Senator Mike Mansfield To President Johnson*, Washington, December 18, 1965, Document 233 in *Foreign Relations Of The United States, 1964–1968*, Volume III, *Vietnam, June–December 1965*.

²⁶⁵ See CIA *Memorandum: The Vietnamese Communists Will to Persist*, August 26, 1966, http://www.foia.cia.gov/sites/default/files/document_conversions/89801/DOC_0001169545.pdf; Institute for Defense Analyses, IDA TS/HQ66-49, “US Bombing in Vietnam: The Effects of US Bombing on North Vietnam’s Ability to Support Military Operations in South Vietnam and Laos: Retrospect and Prospect,” August 29, 1966; and Oleg Hoeffding, *Bombing North Vietnam: An Appraisal of Economic and Political Effects*, Memorandum RM-5213-1-ISA, Prepared for the Office of the Assistant Secretary of Defense/International Security Affairs, Santa Monica: RAND, December 1966. See also *Intelligence Memorandum Prepared in the Central Intelligence Agency*, “North Vietnamese Intentions and Attitudes Toward the War,” Washington, July 25, 1966, Document 191, *FRUS, 1964-1968*, Volume IV, *Vietnam, 1966*.

²⁶⁶ IDA, “US Bombing in Vietnam: The Effects of US Bombing on North Vietnam’s Ability to Support Military Operations in South Vietnam and Laos: Retrospect and Prospect,” August 29, 1966, pp. 56, 65, 69. This conclusion was reconfirmed in subsequent assessments. See e.g. IDA JASON Division, “The Bombing of North Vietnam,” Volume I, “Summary,” IDA Log No. TS/HQ 67-217, Dec. 16, 1967, *ibid.*, pp. 149-55; and *Bombing As A Policy Tool In Vietnam: Effectiveness*, A Staff Study Based On The Pentagon Papers Prepared for the Use of the Committee on Foreign Relations, United States Senate, Study No. 5, October 12, 1972, Washington: US Government Printing Office, 1972.

1964.²⁶⁷ Paradoxically, both the “domino theory” and the “Rostow thesis” that bombing the North would “save” the South had been disproven already in 1964 by the US intelligence community and in two political-military war games convened by the Joint Chiefs of Staff, with “no apparent dampening effect” on senior policymakers.²⁶⁸ The fact that the administration requested a CIA evaluation of the domino theory only *after* adopting it as policy, and then ignored repeated findings that the theory was wrong, underscores not only the apparent futility of the Romanian effort but also the accuracy of its presentations to Washington.²⁶⁹

Indeed, virtually every one of the Romanian challenges to the assumptions underlying the policy of the Johnson administration in Vietnam found echo in the opinion of senior US intelligence and State Department officials. In May 1966, Bodnaras explained the counterproductive impact of US policy in terms of fostering unity among otherwise antagonistic socialist states:

The fact is known that all of the socialist countries have until now accorded and will accord in the future to an increased degree moral support and concrete material assistance to Vietnam. In this sense, to bet on the existing divergences in the Communist movement and in the relations between the socialist countries would be a gratuitous and dangerous illusion. There are differences of opinion among the socialist countries, however, in the problem of Vietnam and of assistance for Vietnam, there is only one way of seeing things because that which happens at present in Vietnam could happen tomorrow in Albania or in Central Europe. The position of all socialist countries in this regard is absent any equivocation, and to count upon the disintegration of the socialist camp in such circumstances would be an error of calculation with tragic repercussions for the aggressor. [[Document 23](#)]

In August 1966 the group of governmental advisors known as the JASON division concluded in a study for the Pentagon’s Institute for Defense Analysis (IDA) that North

²⁶⁷ *Memorandum by the Assistant Secretary of State for Far Eastern Affairs (Rusk) to the Deputy Undersecretary of State (Matthews)*, January 31, 1951 in *Foreign Relations of the United States*, 1951, Volume IV, *Asia and the Pacific*, Part 1, pp. 16, 20; National Security Action Memorandum 288, March 17, 1964; and *Memorandum From the Secretary of Defense (McNamara) to the President*, March 16, 1964, Document 84 in *FRUS*, 1964-1968, Vol. 1, *Vietnam* 1964.

²⁶⁸ Ford, *CIA and the Vietnam Policymakers: Three Episodes 1962 – 1968*, (1998), episode 2, note 115; Special National Intelligence Estimate (SNIE 53-2-64): *The Situation in South Vietnam*, October 1, 1964, http://www.foia.cia.gov/sites/default/files/document_conversions/89801/DOC_0001166521.pdf and Special National Intelligence Estimate (SNIE 10-3-64): *Probable Communist Reactions To Certain Possible US/GVN Courses of Actions*, October 9, 1964, http://www.foia.cia.gov/sites/default/files/document_conversions/89801/DOC_0001166418.pdf. For the SIGMA war games of April 6-9, 1964 and September 8-17, 1964 see Ford (1998).

²⁶⁹ *Memorandum From the Board of National Estimates to the Director of Central Intelligence (McCone)*, Washington, June 9, 1964, Document 209 in *FRUS*, 1964-1968, Volume I, *Vietnam*.

Vietnam had actually become stronger since the bombing started, a conclusion subsequently confirmed by INR, CIA and independent assessments.²⁷⁰ According to IDA and RAND assessments, for example:

Hanoi's political relations with its allies were in some respects strengthened by the bombing. The attacks had the effect of encouraging greater material and political support from the Soviet Union than might otherwise have been the case.²⁷¹ ... Hanoi succeeded in attracting increasing military and economic aid from its allies, China as well as the USSR.²⁷²

Apart from attempting to persuade Washington as to the true nature of the war by focusing on the individual assumptions that underlay it, Bucharest presented the most essential conditions and main hurdles to negotiations that it had identified in long discussions with both sides. While negotiations had not been an acceptable topic of discussion for Hanoi during his May 1966 visit, Bodnaras informed the US ambassador afterward that his delegation identified two main obstacles that if addressed would significantly improve the situation and advance the movement towards negotiations:

- (1) In the first place, in our opinion, it is necessary to stop definitively and unconditionally the bombing of North Vietnam as an indispensable measure for the creation of elementary conditions for the beginning of calm discussions. It is inconceivable that the government of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam should accept even the idea of negotiations under the pressure of terror bombing. The bombing must cease without linking it to any other sort of condition.
- (2) In the second place, it is necessary to establish direct contacts with the leadership of the National Liberation Front, the principal political and military force that opposes the Americans in South Vietnam. A net distinction can be made between the problems that will be discussed with the government of D. R. Vietnam and those that regard the NLF of South Vietnam. It is necessary for the fact to be very well understood that, in regard to the problems of South Vietnam, the Front [and not Hanoi] is the only factor with the necessary responsibility and competence to carry out discussions. [[Document 23](#)]

²⁷⁰ JASON was part of the MITRE Corporation, a non-profit organization originally formed to coordinate government technology projects. JASON members included 11 Nobel laureates.

²⁷¹ IDA, JASON Division, IDA TS/HQ66-49, *US Bombing in Vietnam: The Effects of US Bombing on North Vietnam's Ability to Support Military Operations in South Vietnam and Laos: Retrospect and Prospect*, Aug. 29, 1966, and *Pentagon Papers*, IV.C.7(b), "Volume II: The Air War in North Vietnam," pp.122-27.

²⁷² Hoeffding (1966), p. vi.

The Romanians were very clear that an “unconditional halt to the bombing” meant simply to attach no further conditions to the halt. As Foreign Minister Manescu explained to Secretary Rusk, “Of course, the suspension of the bombing must not be conditioned or fixed for a limited time period” because any “limited and conditional halting of the bombardment, with the imminent threat of its resumption, can hardly be considered of a nature to create the necessary premises for the beginning of calm discussions.” [[Document 34](#)]

Bucharest argued the advantages of undertaking these moves and the likely repercussions if they were not undertaken – knowing full well that US attention was drawn by exaggerated assessments of the disadvantages such actions might entail. Aside from the reduction in human and material costs, the Romanians pointed out the reputational gains made by France regionally and internationally after the French military withdrawal from Vietnam, and the surprisingly good relations that Paris now maintained with Hanoi after forty years of war. France, and De Gaulle personally, enjoyed similar prestige benefits when they withdrew French forces from Algeria. According to Ceausescu, the same benefits would accrue to the United States if it ceased its bombing campaign against North Vietnam:

The unconditional cessation of bombing would only bring advantage to the United States of America. It is no secret for anyone that the continuation of this bombing enjoys no support from any state and I do not believe, if it continues, that the bombing will bring support from anyone in the future either. The Democratic Republic of Vietnam does not request that the cessation of bombing be considered an obligatory or forced renunciation on the part of the USA, but that it should result from a deliberate decision of the USA itself. This would contribute not to a loss of any prestige by the USA. On the contrary, it will strengthen that prestige. I believe that very many people would see this action as a wise, rational and useful measure in the cause of peace and, at the same time, it would create conditions for arriving at negotiations. [[Document 41](#)]

The evidence suggests this advocacy was born of strategy rather than tactics, of conviction rather than opportunity. “This measure,” Ceausescu insisted, “taken on the initiative of the USA, will strengthen the authority of the United States of America and win more friends.” Of course, the party secretary continued, you might say “but the USA is a greater power than France!” True enough, “but that is even greater reason for it to proceed, so to speak, more generously.” In doing so, both the US government and its president “will gain prestige, both in the country and abroad, and you will gain more friends in Vietnam than you have now.” [41]

As a result of their May visit to Hanoi the Romanians concluded that direct US contacts with the NLF were necessary. After repeated discussions over the course of 1965-1966 it had become clear to Bucharest that Hanoi did not control the NLF and could not “resolve” the struggle in South Vietnam. Ostracizing the NLF had, in fact, the inadvertent consequence of obstructing Hanoi’s ability to move towards negotiations without appearing to betray the South Vietnamese. Bringing in the NLF would ameliorate this problem and eliminate the auxiliary issues of misinterpretation and self-interested distortion that usually accompanied third party intermediation.

As the lack of US interest in even recognizing, much less contacting, the NLF became evident, Bucharest restated the necessary conditions as cessation of the bombing campaign and direct US-North Vietnamese contacts, banking on the probability that the limitations of Hanoi’s influence over the NLF would be one of the first topics that such contacts would clarify. As Ceausescu explained to Ambassador Davis in January 1967:

If you would like my sincere opinion, the conditions now exist for achieving, through well-thought actions on the part of the United States of America, a solution that would be acceptable both for the USA and for Vietnam. Events, however, may intervene that render this not quite as possible. ...

I believe that, when one arrives at the negotiation table, many problems will certainly be debated. It cannot be otherwise: when two sit down to discuss, both one’s opinion and the other’s must be heard, and in the end an acceptable solution for the respective parties will be reached.²⁷³ [[Document 41](#)]

US officials were particularly interested in what advice Bucharest was giving Hanoi. Along with natural concern regarding the sincerity and accuracy of Romanian advice to Washington this was also partly due to Soviet bloc insistence that Bucharest was not to be trusted, driven less by the Vietnam issue than by Soviet concerns regarding their maverick ally’s independence and increasing international leverage and influence. During Manescu’s 5 October, 1966 meeting with Secretary Rusk and Ambassador Goldberg, Rusk returned to Romanian advice that “the USA should immediately halt the bombing against North

²⁷³ As considered opinion later acknowledged: “At any time after 1964, the United States could have attained peace by negotiating a settlement with Hanoi, or with the NLF, for a coalition government in the South that eventually would have sought unity with the North. Such a peace could have been achieved with far less harm to American international prestige and national security and domestic unity than was occasioned by a costly and eventually humiliating military debacle.” Schandler, “US Military Victory in Vietnam: A Dangerous Illusion?” in McNamara, Blight, Bingham, Biersteker and Schandler (1999), p. 369.

Vietnam” and asked: “That is the advice that you are giving us, but what advice are you giving the Vietnamese?”” [\[Document 34\]](#)

Romanian procedure was to openly stipulate its full support for the Vietnamese in this contest and then move on to the central problem of shifting the struggle from the purely military to the political and diplomatic sphere. As Manescu explained, “so long as the aggressive actions of the USA are continued against the independence and sovereignty of Vietnam, the only advice that can be given to the Vietnamese people is that of continuing the fight.” If, however, the United States truly desired peace, it had to realistically address “the problems that require resolution,” and the first step was “to stop the aerial bombardment against the D.R. Vietnam.” [\[Document 34\]](#)

Ironically, Romania’s relentless effort to present accurately Hanoi’s essential condition of an unconditional bombing cessation and its “talk-fight” policy led the US ambassador on post in Bucharest and several administration officials to misinterpret both the halt and “talk-fight” as Romanian positions rather than faithful descriptions of positions held and policies pursued by the North Vietnamese. As Ambassador Davis reported a day after his January 31, 1967 discussion with Ceausescu, he “neither expected nor received any hint of change in the Romanian position” that the “first step toward peaceful settlement should be unconditional cessation of bombing of North.”²⁷⁴

After conferring with the North Vietnamese leadership in May 1966, the Romanians had indeed recognized the need to emphasize the primacy of a bombing halt to enable discussions. However, prior to May 1966 others had stressed it more. As Senator Mansfield reported after his December 1965 mission:

In conversations with the Romanians and particularly with Poles and Soviets the point has repeatedly been made that they could do nothing as long as bombing of North Vietnam and “US aggressive actions” continued. They were especially emphatic regarding bombing of the North.²⁷⁵

Misunderstanding of the calls for a bombing halt as a Romanian rather than North Vietnamese position was paralleled by Pentagon misinterpretation of the “Romanian

²⁷⁴ *Pentagon Papers* (1969) Part IV.C.4, p. 254.

²⁷⁵ *Telegram From the President’s Special Assistant for National Security Affairs (Bundy) to President Johnson, in Texas*, Washington, December 10, 1965, 11:55 a.m., Document 227 in *Foreign Relations Of The United States, 1964–1968*, Volume III, *Vietnam, June–December 1965*. Asked his opinion of another bombing pause, Mansfield advised Dean Rusk in December 1965 that if attempted, “it ought to be not ‘a wait and see’ gesture but, rather, coupled with other direct US initiatives, with Poles, Romanians and, perhaps, even with the Chinese in Warsaw.”

objective” as getting “negotiations started ‘without interrupting armed actions in SVN (South Vietnam).’”²⁷⁶ In fact, Bucharest consistently sought to persuade Hanoi to engage in diplomacy (and eventual negotiations) *alongside* its military effort at a time when the North Vietnamese rejected that diplomacy and negotiations altogether. Continued fighting was a given. Hanoi had to be sold on the advantages of negotiation.

Bucharest’s winning argument had been that Hanoi could engage in talks without halting military operations and endangering its political or military position. However, it did have to make additional political-diplomatic efforts. The Romanian objective, expressed repeatedly to American interlocutors, was “getting the parties to start talking.”²⁷⁷

Reciprocity and Unification

Bucharest repeatedly attempted to disabuse their American interlocutors of the notion that concrete military “reciprocity” for a cessation of bombing was attainable. In spite of these efforts, Washington held on to the concept with a death-grip, not only during 1965 but also through 1966, 1967 and until the final months of 1968. Although not yet referring to it by the specific term “reciprocity” during 1965, the administration locked onto this approach as policy by mid-1966, possibly with the encouragement of the innocently proffered but wildly erroneous conclusions drawn by Jean Sainteny, a French diplomat and otherwise knowledgeable Asia specialist with access to senior Vietnamese leaders. Sainteny traveled to Hanoi as President De Gaulle’s personal emissary in July 1966 and then briefed the US Ambassador in Paris, Charles Bohlen, on his return. According to Ambassador Bohlen:

He said that Pham Van Dong had said to him in Ho Chi Minh’s presence that the US should stop the bombardment of North Vietnam, and that finally after some discussion Sainteny stated that if they were being realistic at all there would have to be some North Vietnamese quid pro quo. Pham Van Dong finally admitted that there would be some such reply from the North, which might take the form of a cessation of “infiltration.”²⁷⁸

²⁷⁶ *Pentagon Papers* (1969) Part IV.C.4, p. 262. The same source likewise claims that the “Romanians were quite frank about admitting that they “were only interested in the stopping of the US bombing.” (pp. 2-3)

²⁷⁷ According to Ambassador Davis’ report on the Harriman-Maurer conversation of November 29, 1967, the Romanians “focused on only one objective – getting negotiations started ‘and nothing more.’” Ibid, p. 269. Maurer’s stress on this appears throughout the US transcript. *Memorandum of Conversation (Harriman-Maurer)*, Bucharest, November 28, 1967, 10:00 a.m., in Box 555, “21-30 Nov., Asia and Eastern Europe,” Special Files: Public Service, 1918-1986, Harriman Papers, LOC.

²⁷⁸ *Telegram From the Embassy in France to the Department of State*, Paris, July 21, 1966, 1533Z, Document 182 in *FRUS, 1964–1968, Volume IV, Vietnam, 1966*.

Sainteny's "personal view" was that the United States should "get in touch with Hanoi" and propose the "cessation of bombing in the North in return for some commitment to cease infiltration into the South."²⁷⁹ This formula was very attractive in Washington. And Sainteny's independent confirmation that the North Vietnamese considered it reasonable may have helped to move it from US preference to policy. It promised not only an end to the war but the preservation of the division between North and South Vietnam and the continued existence of the American-sponsored regime in Saigon. Unfortunately, it was also completely unacceptable to Hanoi since it amounted to a *de facto* capitulation.

Apart from Sainteny's speculation, there is no evidence that Pham Van Dong and Ho Chi Minh ever considered such a thing, and plenty of evidence to the contrary.²⁸⁰ Exactly one month before the Canadian effort run by Chester Ronning had gone down in flames precisely because of the "impossible" demand for reciprocity.²⁸¹ The fact that Pham Van Dong chose to relate that sad tale to Maurer during the latter's October visit indicates that there had been no reconsideration in the ensuing three months since the Ronning fiasco. [[Document 30](#)]

The leaders in Hanoi may have openly acknowledged their need to respond to a good faith move by the United States. They may even have suggested that something might be considered along the lines of voluntary restraint regarding "infiltrations," a topic much bewailed in Washington. However, the North Vietnamese always held the unilateral bombing of their country to be an act of terror and intimidation and for that very reason refused to grasp any of the "olive branches" held out by the United States during or after periods of military escalation and intensified bombing. Sainteny's July 1966 visit to Hanoi occurred in the midst of such an escalation, with intensified bombing of the Ho Chi Minh Trail, extensive ground operations in Quang Tri province and, within a week of Sainteny's briefing, the first ever US bombing of North Vietnamese forces in the Demilitarized Zone in the war. The reconsideration implied by the French diplomat was therefore highly improbable.

North Vietnamese leaders apparently did listen to Sainteny's advice not to insist too much on a halt to the bombing, which might explain US confusion over whether bombing cessation was Bucharest's position and not that of Hanoi. According to Pham Van Dong:

²⁷⁹ Ibid.

²⁸⁰ Along with the evidence presented herein, one might add the testimonies of Vietnamese actors in McNamara, Blight, Bingham, Biersteker and Schandler, *Argument Without End: In Search of Answers To The Vietnam Tragedy*, (1999).

²⁸¹ The clear and repeated rejection of reciprocity by Hanoi at the end of June 1966 is catalogued in the *Pentagon Papers* (1997), Part IV. C. 1, pp. 149-152.

We are not the ones who must underscore this too much. During the course of the second [July 1966] visit by Sainteny, he said that: “If you insist on the cessation of bombing, it could be interpreted as a weakness.”²⁸²

The concept of reciprocity also was very much bound up with the refusal of the Johnson administration to reconsider the nature of the war and understand that the conflict had morphed from a civil war, in which majority populations on both sides desired unification, into a war for independence against foreign (US) aggression, now that the United States was bearing the brunt of the fighting. When Ambassador Davis pointedly asked whether an end to the bombing campaign would bring about an end to the flow of manpower and resources from North Vietnam into the South, Bodnaras called attention to the flaws in such an approach:

In regard to the so-called problem of “infiltrations,” around which a great case has been made in the taking of official positions as well as in the American press, it is necessary that things be viewed with lucidity and realism. Vietnam represents a single country and the Vietnamese people are one in the same, both in the North and in the South. Many of the leaders of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam (for example, Pham Van Dong or Le Duan) come from the South, just as there are without doubt numerous leaders and fighters of the National Liberation Front in South Vietnam who are originally from the North. It thus appears natural that the Vietnamese in the North should support their fellow citizens in the South in the struggle against foreign occupation. ... [Moreover] the assistance from the North is not all that great in quantity, it is not and it could not be the cause and elementary motor of the vast popular war underway in South Vietnam, whose motives must be sought elsewhere. [\[Document 23\]](#)

As noted above, the Johnson administration had gone to some lengths in September and October 1966 to sell the idea that US willingness to engage in negotiations was conditioned only by the existence of some “indication” or “sign” as to what would come next.²⁸³ Bucharest was extremely dubious as to the sincerity of those claims.²⁸⁴ However, in conformity with their standard operating procedures, the Romanians acted as though they were taking the Americans at their word, a practice indistinguishable from calling their bluff,

²⁸² ANR, Fond C.C. al P.C.R., Secția Relații Externe, dosar 127/1966, 31.XII.1966, f. 68.

²⁸³ See the section “Transmitting the Trinh Signal” above.

²⁸⁴ Claims transmitted to the Romanians, most prominently by Ambassador Goldberg, suggesting that the USA had backed away from strict military reciprocity for any halt in the bombing proved more “smoke” than substance. As the analyst responsible for the *Pentagon Papers* stated: “The American position on DRV reciprocity was firm.” Leslie H. Gelb and Richard K. Betts, *The Irony of Vietnam: The System Worked*, Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institute, 1979, pp. 161-162.

if bluff it was. Washington could either “put its money where its mouth was,” and confirm its sincerity, or balk and place itself on the spot once again. Thus, while disappointed, the Romanians were not surprised when Davis informed them that the United States “can in no case stop the bombing in exchange for a simple agreement to engage in talks,” could not “be satisfied with a simple declaration that something could happen if we cease the bombing,” and required Hanoi’s commitment to “concrete” moves that would halt “infiltrations.”

[\[Document 41\]](#)

Here again, considered opinion within the US government already identified reciprocity as a non-starter. In October 1965 State Department intelligence explained that the North Vietnamese were “ever wary of appearing weak or prepared to compromise while the bombing continued” and “this sensitivity would prevent Hanoi from responding positively to pauses in the bombing which were accompanied by implied or explicit demands for reciprocal de-escalation in the South.”²⁸⁵

INR believed that Hanoi would make no concessions before the bombing halted and would give no quid pro quo for a halt. It would also reject or ignore a bombing pause based on reciprocity or one coupled with an explicit ultimatum. Even an unannounced pause would not quickly produce any response.²⁸⁶

The Romanians were equally up front about their support for Vietnamese unification, and provided a number of reasons why the United States should be so as well. This was an incredibly important issue for the Romanians since they also constituted a divided state.²⁸⁷ While not openly opposing it, unification was in fact anathema to the US position that North Vietnam was a “foreign aggressor.”²⁸⁸ The Johnson administration frequently claimed to back unification so long as it was accomplished peacefully and democratically but it understood that unification would spell the end of the administration’s policy in Vietnam, given the lack of popularity for the US sponsored regime in Saigon.

²⁸⁵ Section C-IV: “Thematic Study: Prospects for Beginning Talks and Negotiating A Settlement,” in *Intelligence and Vietnam: The Top Secret 1969 State Department Study* (2004), pp. 3-4, <http://nsarchive.gwu.edu/NSAEBB/NSAEBB121/>.

²⁸⁶ Section V: “Trial by Force: March 1965-February 1966,” in *Intelligence and Vietnam: The Top Secret 1969 State Department Study* (2004), p. 24, <http://nsarchive.gwu.edu/NSAEBB/NSAEBB121/>. See also Research Far East (RFE)-Memorandum (MM), “Hanoi’s Responses to US Political Initiatives,” October 8, 1965 and RFE-MM, “Possible DRV Responses to a Pause,” INR, October 8, 1965 as cited in Ibid.

²⁸⁷ Watts (2010), pp. 5, 14-16, 93-95, 214, 255-257, 283-284, 439-450; Watts (2012b), http://www.wilsoncenter.org/sites/default/files/CWIHP_Working_Paper_65_Watts_Romanian_Interkit_0.pdf.

²⁸⁸ Schandler in McNamara, Blight, Bingham, Biersteker and Schandler (1999), pp. 368-369.

Bucharest maintained that, in the end, the United States could not prevent the overwhelming majority of Vietnamese from adopting the system of their choice, nor should they try to do so. They also affirmed, as did the North Vietnamese themselves, that neither Hanoi nor the NLF was seeking to immediately impose their system upon the South, and that the leadership in Hanoi was fully cognizant of US prestige considerations and “not interested” in trying to humiliate the Americans by forcing such a change as soon as US forces were withdrawn. While US officials viewed this as a self-serving argument, experienced Asia hands with excellent ties to the leadership in Hanoi were reporting very much the same, and subsequent testimony by members of that leadership confirms the accuracy of the Romanian presentations. As Bodnaras explained in May 1966:

The impression that the liberation of southern Vietnam would presuppose the immediate and automatic extension of the existing social-political regime in D. R. Vietnam is erroneous. After the withdrawal of the American troops, in conditions in which the Vietnamese in the south could exercise their free will, a government will probably be formed that will accommodate the principal political forces of South Vietnam, with the result that the political formula for the reunification of Vietnam will be established through direct contacts between the representatives of those two sides. It is evident that the National Liberation Front, through the adherence of the masses that it enjoys, through the effective control that it exercises over the majority of the territory and population of South Vietnam now represents the political and military factor with the greatest weight in this part of the country. In any case, whatever will be the formula to which they will arrive, the Vietnamese people is the one that will say the last word in the future political regulation of Vietnam.

[\[Document 23\]](#)

In January 1967 Nicolae Ceausescu likewise informed the US Ambassador:

From what I know, neither the National Liberation Front nor the Democratic Republic of Vietnam propose the immediate reunification of the country and both consider it a problem of the future. Regarding this, their position almost corresponds to the US position, meaning that unification must be the result of the decision of the two Vietnamese states and should be produced along a peaceful path. So it appears that you also have points of view similar with those of the Vietnamese, including with regard to the structure of South Vietnam.

Such that, look, there are two problems on which you have the same point of view, including in regard to the political solution of the conflict the points of view are close. [\[Document 41\]](#)

When Davis suggested that the division of Vietnam was an acceptable reality by referring to the existence of “two Vietnams, two Koreas and two Germanys,” and noting that Washington did “not believe that their reunification can be realized through the use of force,” Ceausescu reminded him of the American and Romanian wars for independence, and pointed out the essential instability that the forceful maintenance of divided states by external actors created within the international system:

For our part: we have the same point of view regarding reunification as you. Neither Vietnam nor Korea nor Germany can be reunified through the resort to arms. But, from what I know, this is also the opinion of the government of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam. We must understand the realities, but we cannot oppose natural processes from arriving in the end to the unification of this people.

There is a similar example in the history of the USA itself, although it is true that it is somewhat older. We also have such an example in the history of Romania when, with all of the efforts of the great powers to obstruct the union of the Romanian Lands, it was realized nonetheless, and the fact that Romania then realized a national state unit threatened and threatens no one. On the contrary, in my opinion, this constitutes a factor of stability in this part of the world.

If Vietnam will achieve unification, it will be in the service of peace in this part of the world... if we appeal to history, history proves that we should not be afraid of this unification, because so long as this people lives divided in two, there will be permanent motives for discussions and agitation.

If you want to know my opinion, in the end not even Korea can remain forever divided, and so long as it is divided in two it will constitute a factor of disquiet and a danger of conflict. ... People in both North Korea and South Korea who are not satisfied with the current state of affairs and those who are preoccupied with finding a path toward reunification will always be found. Of course, moments could intervene when some consider that they can do this with force as well. So long as this state of affairs is maintained the danger of that certainly exists. No one can give guarantees in this regard. Do you think that if Germany remains divided in two for a long period, there will not be permanent troubles?! ... The Germans will not be forever reconciled with their division in two.²⁸⁹ [[Documents 41](#)]

²⁸⁹ Bodnarus later underscored to another US ambassador that the Soviets “brusquely dismissed Romanian queries” about a German peace treaty and insisted that “the German question had been settled, the division was permanent, and Brandt’s policy was its guarantee: ‘As if Germans, east and west, will not eventually come together!’” *Memorandum of Conversation between Emil Bodnarus and Harry G. Barnes, US Ambassador to Romania*, May 24, 1974, obtained by Mircea Munteanu, Cold War International History Project, from the National Archives, College park, Nixon NSC Box 701/703, for the George Washington Cold War Conference on the Sino American Opening and the Cold War (1969-1972), George Washington University, 8-9 February 2002. <http://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/110457>.

When confronted with this logic, which the Romanians would raise again and again with their American interlocutors during 1967 as well, the US ambassador expressed his belief that the US government agreed entirely. But although Washington accepted in principle that “no people could be satisfied or pleased with a long-term division of its people in two, and that this will always represent a source of disquiet,” this, the ambassador emphasized, remained “a problem of the future.” [[Document 41](#)]

Conclusion

Did Romanian advice have a significant impact on Hanoi’s molding and delivery of the first Trinh Signal? On the one hand, the DRV leadership did not immediately adopt Bucharest’s recommendations for such an explicit declaration. On the other, they did express their wholehearted agreement with them. And, by October-November 1966, they did commit to implement them as soon as circumstances permitted.

The Romanian delegation was not overly optimistic as to the practical impact of their arguments because every round of discussions, especially in October 1966, ended with Hanoi’s refrain that the timing and conditions were “not ripe.” At the same time, the delegation was left with no doubts that its recommendations would be seriously considered and debated by the DRV leadership in the weeks and months to come. Pham Van Dong had very explicitly stated as much:

Comrades, we consider that our interviews have given results. ... The best way of thanking you is to take seriously all that you have said to us – the object and the result of your reflections. ... We will accord the greatest attention to the fight in the international arena and in the diplomatic domain, which we will develop. [[Document 30](#)]

The close correlation between Romanian advice on the form and timing of the Trinh signal, the reinforcing advice given to the Vietnamese foreign minister in Bucharest that November, and Trinh’s pledge at that meeting to implement Bucharest’s recommendations constitute compelling circumstantial evidence that Romanian arguments had influenced Hanoi. Prime Minister Pham Van Dong provided another piece of evidence suggesting the degree of that influence in the production of the Trinh signal in September 1967, almost on the one-year anniversary of his October 1966 discussions with Prime Minister Maurer.

In this first visit by Maurer to Hanoi since 1966, the D.R.V. prime minister clearly linked the publicly announced Trinh signal of January 1967 to the Romanian advice offered at the beginning of October 1966.²⁹⁰ Thanking the Romanians on behalf of the Politburo, Dong stressed at the end of September 1967 “that which you told us last year, almost to this very day, proved to be very useful to us”:

Look why we affirm that what you told us was very useful for us. You know what happened on January 28, 1967,²⁹¹ referring to the Declaration of the foreign minister of D.R. Vietnam with regard to the war in Vietnam; I consider that this Declaration represents an effective action that influenced public opinion, mobilizing a general struggle in order for the Americans to leave this country.²⁹²

This was exactly the reasoning employed by the Romanians during their visit to Hanoi in October 1966 and again in their discussion with Trinh in Bucharest at the end of November. The Vietnamese prime minister underscored several times the high regard in which Romanian advice was held, stressing “from the very start,” on this occasion as well, “our ears our ready to listen and our mind to judge seriously” everything the Romanians had come to say:

We will listen to you with great attention, we will take under consideration all you have to tell us, because you have made this effort, coming to our country not in order to spout banalities, not in order to tell us things that anyone could have told us, but on the contrary. It is possible that you will place the accent on certain vital things or on certain nuances. We will take all of these things into consideration.²⁹³

Pham Van Dong reiterated this appreciation for Romanian counsel, again linking earlier advice to the Trinh signal:

²⁹⁰ Along with Prime Minister Pham Van Dong, the foreign minister, Nguyen Duy Trinh, the C.C. Secretary for Foreign Relations, Xuan Thuy, Trinh’s deputy at the foreign ministry, Hoang Van Tien, and the D.R.V. ambassador to Romania, Hoang Tu, also took part.

²⁹¹ Trinh’s January 28 interview with Wilfred Burchett was broadcast in English that same day, obviously for American and international audiences. Hanoi VNA International Service in English, 28 January 1967 as reproduced in *Foreign Broadcast Information Service*, Far East, 30 January 1967. It was intensively discussed within the administration and the State Department over the next couple of days. Although it was reproduced in the Vietnamese daily *Nan Ghan* on January 29, 1967, it did not appear in an English language newspaper until a week later. See *New York Times* and *Washington Post* for February 8, 1967.

²⁹² *Transcript of Conversations Between the Romanian Communist Party Delegation and the Vietnamese Delegation*, Hanoi, September 29-30, 1967, ANR, Fond C.C. al P.C.R., Secția Relații Externe, dosar 82/1967, f. 5-6.

²⁹³ *Ibid*, f. 6.

[O]n January 28 of this year, several months after your [October 1966] visit, we declared that if the Americans cease their bombing of the North unconditionally, we could start the conversations. That marked a turning point in our diplomatic position. ... I must say that, although there is no need to repeat it, among the contributions of the socialist countries to the conduct of this war yours has figured first and foremost. Your help is important, extremely effective. It is important for its quality and efficiency. It has given very good results.²⁹⁴

It bears emphasis that the materials presented here are largely single-source. All of the appended documents originate from the Romanian National Archives. Anything close to a definitive assessment of the relative roles of the individual third party intermediaries in shaping Hanoi's reactions and approach to negotiations will require consultation of the Vietnamese records in order to confirm or falsify the accuracy of various elements presented in the archives of their interlocutors. Allowance also must be made for the forms of diplomatic protocol and Vietnamese courtesy.

That said, the timing and nature of the policy debate within the Vietnamese Politburo that led to the resolution of November 1966 strongly suggests Romania as the most significant outside influence. And Bucharest's discussions with Hanoi over the acceptance of negotiations with the United States are more consistent with Vietnamese explanations for the policy shift in their 23 January, 1967 resolution that generated the first Trinh signal than the arguments and reasoning employed by Warsaw (and other bloc interlocutors) in their discussions with the Vietnamese.

On the question as to whether Bucharest was any more successful than other third party efforts (and those of US intelligence services) in persuading Washington that it had misapprehended the nature of the war, and therefore that its policies and actions had to be reconsidered, the answer is clearly negative. However, the documents do attest to the fact that Romanian reports were consistently accurate and its efforts indeed sincere, bearing out the judgments of President Johnson, Secretary of State Dean Rusk, Ambassador Averell Harriman and other administration officials directly involved in the search for a negotiated solution to the war as to the seriousness of Bucharest's effort. The evidence presented here indicates that Romanian mediation during 1965-1966 was far more significant, consistent and influential than previously thought. This earlier role then set the stage for what was only apparently a "sudden" emergence of Romania in the autumn of 1967 as the principal channel known as *PACKERS*.

²⁹⁴ Ibid, f. 47, 50.